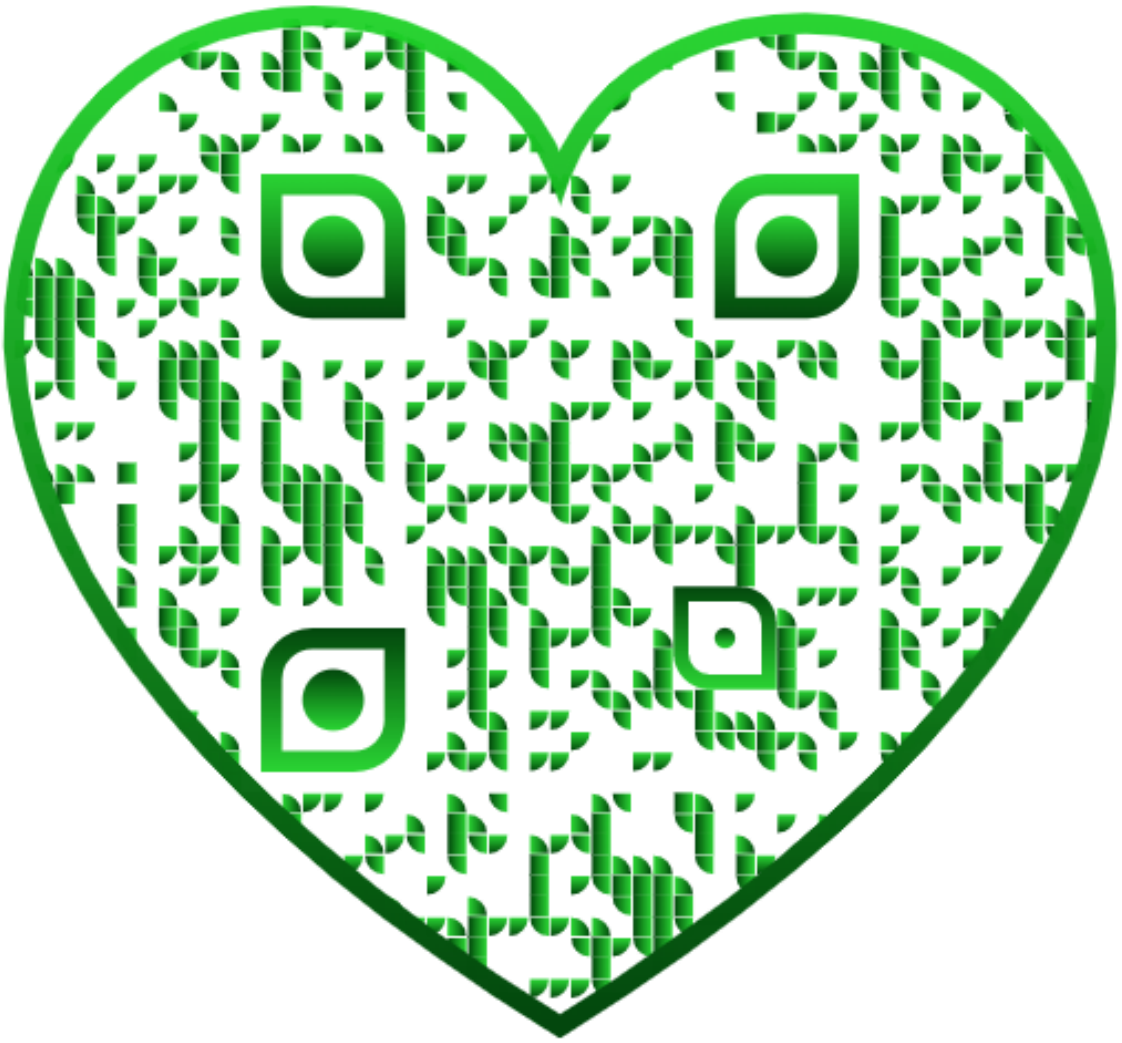
REINCARNATION IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM

THE THIRD KARMAPA AND THE INVENTION OF A TRADITION

RUTH GAMBLE



Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism

THE THIRD KARMAPA AND THE INVENTION OF A TRADITION

Ruth Gamble

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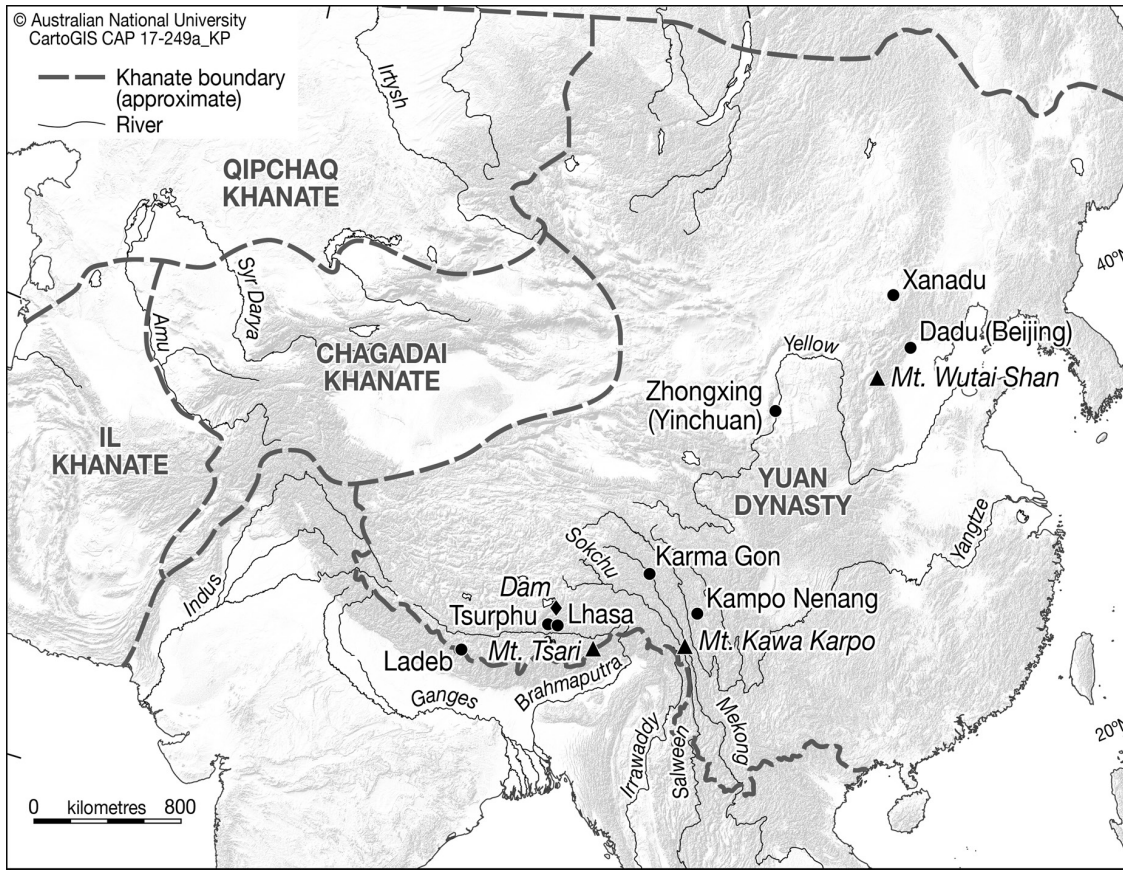
Notes on Dates, Pronunciation, and Translation

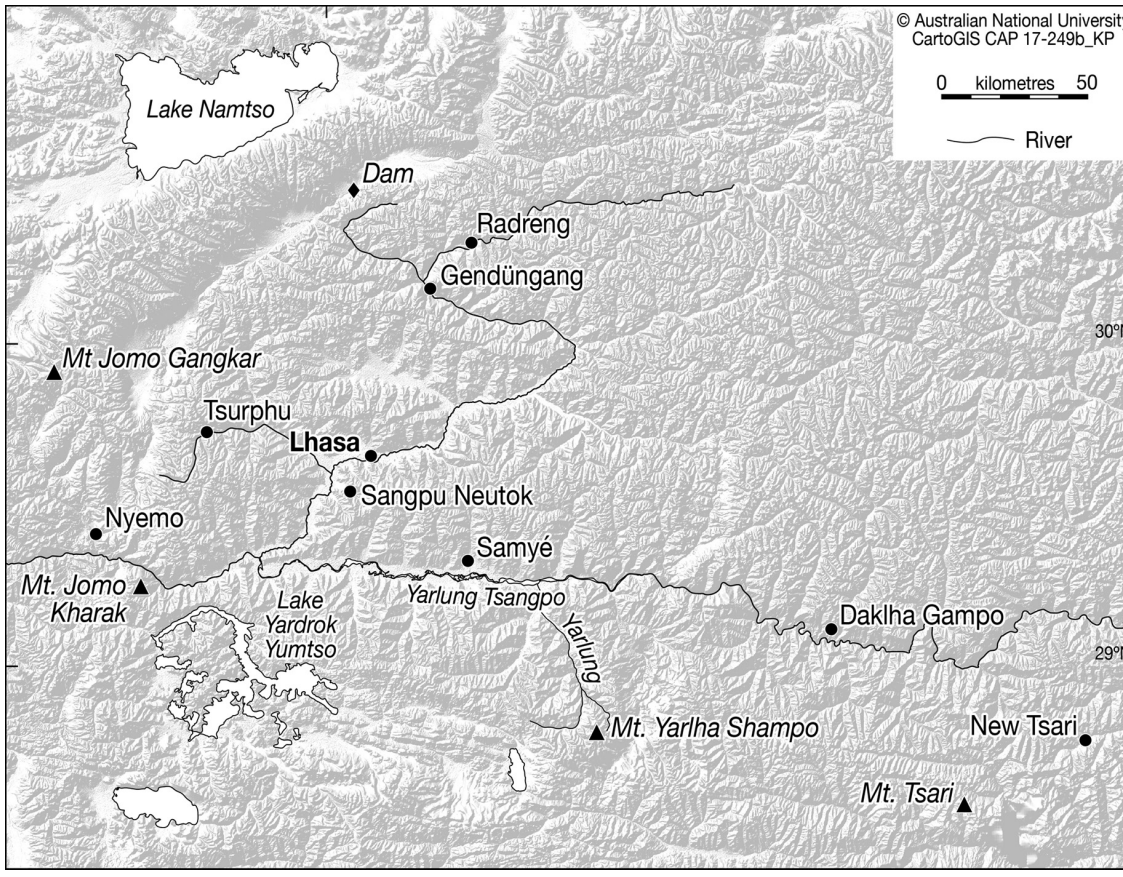
UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, dates are given according to the Western calendar and are in the Common Era. The Tibetan calendar is a lunar calendar and, therefore, there is some misalignment between it and the Western calendar.

Tibetan names and terms in the book are given in transliterated form using the Tibetan and Himalayan Library's Simplified Phonetic Transcription of Standard Tibetan system, which was developed by David Germano and Nicolas Tournadre. These words are then listed in the back of the book with romanized Tibetan spellings along with the phonetic pronunciation for each word. Names and terms of Mongolian origin have been transliterated using F. W. Cleaves's system, with the exception that the *q* in *qan* has been written as *kh* for ease of understanding. All Chinese words have been transliterated using Pinyin.

All translations are the author's own unless otherwise stated. For the sake of space notes on these translations are limited.



MAP 1 Tibet during the Mongol Era



MAP 2 Rangjung Dorjé's Residences and Destinations

Introduction

THE KARMAPAS' JOURNEY TO XANADU

LADEP, THE DEEP valley in which Rangjung Dorjé was born in 1284, lies in the shadows of the high Himalaya, in the Latö region of southern Tibet. For centuries, its steep verges marked the edges of its inhabitants' world. They were farmers and herders, and the land sustained them. The only reasons to leave were trade or pilgrimage.

For Rangjung Dorjé, by contrast, Ladep was only the first stop in a peripatetic life. Soon after he was born, he left. His parents were itinerant workers who carried him out of its narrow confines as they went elsewhere to seek work, and this early journey set a precedent for the rest of his life. As a child, he traveled through much of the central Himalaya, and as a young man he made his way through central and eastern Tibet. After he became a monk and a yogi, he meditated in mountain solitudes, wrote, and taught a growing number of students. Then, later in life, at age forty-nine, he journeyed even farther afield, down through China's cultivated allotments, to the Yuan Dynasty's winter capital, "the great capital," Dadu, on the site of present day Beijing, and out onto Mongolia's grass plains to the Yuan Dynasty's summer capital, Xanadu.[1]

The journey that Rangjung Dorjé took from the empire's edge to its center was physically difficult and almost impossible socially. Even by Himalayan village standards, he had been born at the bottom of the societal order—"to subdue my pride,"[2] as he put it—to parents who were landless potters. Much had to change for the Mongol court to summon a man of his background. His story was not unique, as many cultures have preserved stories of travelers of modest origins

who attained power and wealth at various Mongol courts, but his journey's mechanism was singular. Rangjung Dorjé attained his place at court as a reincarnate, and during his lifetime this identity was not easily established.

Rangjung Dorjé's complex relationship with his reincarnate persona developed, as most identities do, through a mix of external circumstances and his own agency. His biographies tell us that he first claimed to remember his past lives as a three- or four-year-old. Given his family's modest circumstances, these claims may not have come to much were it not for the intervention of a famous yogi named Orgyenpa (1230–1309). When Rangjung Dorjé was five, Orgyenpa recognized him as the reincarnation of Karma Pakshi (1204–1283). Karma Pakshi, known as "the Karmapa," had, in turn, claimed to be the manifestation of another yogi, Düsum Khyenpa (1110–1193). Düsum Khyenpa was a foundational figure in the Kagyü, or "oral lineage" of Tibetan Buddhism. He was known for wearing a ceremonial black hat, a symbol that Karma Pakshi appropriated. At the end of his long life, Karma Pakshi gave his black hat to Orgyenpa, who "returned" it to Rangjung Dorjé. With his recognition of Rangjung Dorjé, Orgyenpa had done something seminal in Tibetan Buddhism: for the first time, he had introduced a third member of a reincarnation lineage. The reappearance of a Karmapa in the world was no longer a singular event; it was recast as a tradition. Rangjung Dorjé had become "the third to wear the black-hat crown."[3]

On the basis of his reincarnate status, Rangjung Dorjé was granted an education to which few Tibetans, let alone potter's sons, could aspire. He was taught philosophy, literature, medicine, and astrology. He was introduced to the rituals, practices, oral traditions, and texts of his own Kagyü and other Tibetan Buddhist lineages. He met with representatives of Sakya Monastery, home of the Mongols' regents in Tibet. He learned of the mind-training traditions of the Kadam, the radical practices of the the Indian yogi Padampa Sanggyé's (d. 1117) Pacification lineage, and the "treasure" (*gter ma*) texts that were purportedly secreted by the founder of the Nyingma (ancient ones) lineage, Padmasambhava (eighth century). Rangjung Dorjé's writing suggests that Padmasambhava, a revered, semimythical *tantrika* (or tantric practitioner) had a particularly powerful effect on him.

Armed with status and education, Rangjung Dorjé established himself as a famous yogi, a transformative scholar, an influential writer, a charismatic teacher, and the head of several religious institutions. His status as a reincarnate enhanced his other roles, and the reputation he accrued in those activities enhanced the general standing of reincarnates. As his reputation grew, he came to the attention of the court of the Great Khan.[4]

That court was the symbolic center of the greater Mongol Empire, one of the largest polities the world has ever seen. During Rangjung Dorjé's time, this empire

stretched from the South China Sea to Poland. The Great Khans who ruled from Xanadu and Dadu exercised ultimate symbolic sovereignty over the mass of Eurasia and directly ruled its eastern section, which they called the Great Yuan Dynasty.[5] Even this eastern section encompassed a vast territory. It extended over much of the Mongolian steppe, China, Korea, and Tibet; its inexact southwestern border was somewhere in the Himalaya, just south of Ladep.

The Mongol court was based at its capitals, which were legendary centers of power and luxury. The residents of Dadu and Xanadu could attain status and privilege on the grandest of scales. Rangjung Dorjé's writings from the time he resided in the centers of Mongol hegemony suggest, however, that he was unimpressed by their grandeur. He described Xanadu especially as a "prison" where he was held against his will. Instead of celebrating the city's influence and opulence, he mourned its intrigues and debauchery. In Xanadu, he wrote, "The fogs of ignorance get thicker as we wander on multiplying cliffs of depravity."[6] He begged for permission to return to Tibet's high mountains and isolated valleys, but the Great Khan only let him go home once, for a short period. Rangjung Dorjé stopped asking to leave Mongolia when he became ill in early 1339. When he died several months later, at the age of fifty-five in Xanadu, his students noted that he had finally outwitted the Great Khan through death, and would make his way back to Tibet through reincarnation.

As much as Rangjung Dorjé loathed living at court, his position there solidified his reputation as a reincarnate; after the Mongol court had accepted his status as the inheritor of Karma Pakshi's religious authority, few disputed it. Following his death, the boy identified as his reincarnation, Rölpé Dorjé (1340–1383), was born in the isolated mountains of Kongpo in southern Tibet. He was recognized as a child and summoned back to the Mongol court while still a teenager. Through this summons, the Mongol court acknowledged Rölpé Dorjé as Rangjung Dorjé's rebirth, which conferred its official sanction on the tradition of recognizing successive reincarnates in a lineage.[7] Soon after this, the Karmapas' reincarnation model began to proliferate. Within a hundred years it had become a widespread and profoundly influential feature of Tibetan religion and society. It remains so today.

The reincarnation tradition had begun to develop before Rangjung Dorjé's life, and it continued to develop after it. But during his lifetime, profound shifts occurred in the tradition, and he was either directly affected by or the instigator of many of these changes. Rangjung Dorjé's lifelong writing habit, and in particular his biographies and poetry, preserved a subjective portal through which to view these changes.

What they reveal is a tradition in progress. Rangjung Dorjé did not enjoy great authority merely because of his reincarnate status; he had to invest much time and

creative purpose in the cultivation and promotion of it. To solidify his identity, he had to synthesize the Karmapa tradition's underpinning narratives and integrate them into the variety of existing and emerging institutions with which they were associated. The process of adapting the Karmapa reincarnation lineage to these institutions meant convincing his community to accept the authority of a potter's son as the Karmapa, often in ways that disadvantaged them. As he documents in his autobiographies and songs, this project met with significant resistance. But by the time he died, a critical mass of people were convinced he would return.

TIBET'S REINCARNATION INSTITUTIONS

The events of Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime fit into a much larger history of reincarnation in Tibet. Belief in reincarnation had been well-established on the Tibetan Plateau by Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime. Tibetans had professed a belief in some form of rebirth even in pre-Buddhist times,[8] and following the introduction of Buddhism in the seventh century it became—and remains—one of the main organizing principles of Tibetan morality and cosmology. In the Tibetan Buddhist worldview, a person's morality, their good and bad deeds, determines what kind of rebirth they achieve, life after life. These rebirths are lived in myriad worlds where inhabitants experience various combinations of suffering and happiness. At the bottom of the moral heap, at the lowest point of Buddhist cosmology, are the hells, where those who have performed heinous deeds live out their karmic sentences. At the heights of the cycle of rebirth are the gods, who enjoy great bliss as long as their good karma endures. But after long lives, even the gods are compelled to suffer when their good karma is exhausted and they must take rebirth. This rotation through existences is what Buddhists call *saṃsāra*, or cyclic existence, and escape from it is the fundamental goal of Buddhist practice.

In Tibet, however, several other strands were added to this basic belief structure. Because Tibetans practiced Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle) Buddhism, they believed that buddhas and bodhisattvas continue to manifest for the benefit of beings even after liberation from *saṃsāra*. Buddhas, they believed, had the ability to manifest bodies and other forms at will and in infinite variety; they could even invent worlds. Depending on where they were on the spectrum between ordinary beings and completely awakened buddhas, bodhisattvas too could control their future rebirths and manifest myriad worldly and divine forms.

The multiplicity of this Mahāyāna worldview was, furthermore, personalized by the practice of Vajrayāna (or tantric) Buddhism in Tibet, with its focus on subjective transformation. By practicing tantra, its adherents claimed, you could

transform into a buddha in one life. By Rangjung Dorjé's time, this belief in personal transformation had led some to claim for themselves or others the status of a bodhisattva's, or even a buddha's, "manifestation" (*sprul ba* or *rnam 'phrul*), and as Leonard van der Kuijp and José Cabezón have noted, this tradition was particularly prominent in the Kadam and Kagyü lineages.[9]

Just before Rangjung Dorjé's time, in part due to the development of the "treasure tradition" in the Nyingma lineage, a parallel reincarnation narrative developed that was focused on directed "rebirth." This narrative personalized reincarnation; rather than labeling beings as the "manifestations" of otherworldly bodhisatvas and buddhas, they began to be called the "coming again" (*yang sri*) or, simply, "birth" (*skye ba* or *sku skye ba*) of respected, deceased people.

There was a clear crossover between these two descriptions of intentional embodiment, but rebirth was a more stable and comprehensible idea. It suggested that a bodhisattva's consciousness continued to abide in the world as a discernible entity—and that idea provided a level of existential security that multiple, synchronous, unpredictable manifestations could not. The Karmapa reincarnation institution was built on the certainty of rebirth. Rangjung Dorjé was a rebirth of Karma Pakshi, born soon after he died, and Rolpé Dorjé was born soon after Rangjung Dorjé died. The Karmapa rebirth lineage demonstrated that plans could be made in relation to rebirths, institutions could be built around them, and property could be transferred between them. The possibilities of this model eventually led Tibetans to recognize an expanding group of people as the reincarnate heads of land-owning institutions.

As this class arose in the centuries after Rangjung Dorjé's death, an older term was retooled to describe its members: they came to be called "emanation bodies" (Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*), or *sprul sku* in Tibetan, which is often pronounced *trülku*. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, this term had been used as part of the tripartite classification of a buddha's ontology.[10] "Emanation bodies" were this-worldly manifestations of buddhas who could guide ordinary beings. It was the grossest form of a buddha's being. A subtler "enjoyment body" (Skt. *sambhogakāya*; Tib. *longs sku*) resided in heavenly "pure lands" where it taught advanced practitioners; and beings who were awakened themselves were able to perceive a buddha's "truth body" (Skt. *dharmakāya*; Tib. *chos sku*), the nature of the awakened mind.

The use of the term *sprul sku* to describe reincarnates developed slowly; the term is not used this way in Rangjung Dorjé's compositions or in the writings of the fourth Karmapa, Rölpé Dorjé. Instead, as a reflection of the tantric practice of viewing one's guru as a buddha, they use the term *sprul sku* to describe their gurus. In Rangjung Dorjé's writing, *sprul sku* is used as a synonym for Orgyenpa. But later, after Rangjung Dorjé's and Rölpe Dorjé's deaths, as more and more gurus

became recognized reincarnates—perhaps as the two categories of guru and reincarnate were blended—reincarnate gurus came to be known as *sprul sku*.

Within this new category, the two tropes of manifestation and rebirth were sometimes integrated and sometimes bifurcated. Many of the oldest and more powerful *sprul sku* lineages, including the Karmapas, came to be seen both as rebirths and as manifestations of divine bodhisattvas or buddhas. Most newer and less-powerful reincarnates were understood to be only the directed rebirths of realized beings. This hierarchy was necessary because, over the centuries, the number of *sprul sku* multiplied and some of them became very powerful. During the seventeenth century, one *sprul sku* lineage, the Dalai Lamas, became the Plateau's potentate. Their rise to power was accompanied by a rise in spiritual status; the Dalai Lamas eventually came to be understood as earthly manifestations of Tibet's patron bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara. They also helped spread reincarnation to neighboring Himalayan countries, Mongolia, Russia, and, more recently, the West.[11]

INVENTING A TRADITION

Along with its cultural and political influence, another result of Tibetans' long engagement with the reincarnation tradition has been its naturalization. For people living in Tibet and neighboring regions, the presence of reincarnated teachers is not a cultural novelty and it is not a new idea; it is a part of life. The invention of the tradition has been forgotten, and people engage with it through ritual and habit rather than through history.[12]

The reincarnation tradition is one of countless invented traditions that have developed in different places and times, and since the late twentieth century have become subjects of numerous studies, but the tendency toward conservatism in the Tibetan cultural sphere makes this a particularly interesting case. Because there are social and cultural proscriptions against religious innovation, those who established the Karmapa reincarnation institution presented their innovation as an already invented tradition. Since then, others have, in turn, used these traditions as a precedent, both for new Karmapas and other reincarnation traditions.

In the Tibetan language, these reincarnation traditions are called "body series" or "body rosary" (*sku phreng*). Reincarnates are described as the second, third, or fourteenth embodiment of a reincarnation lineage, and each member of the series, each bead in a reincarnation lineage's rosary, adds to its prestige. New body rosaries acquire prestige by association. They are usually established with the aid of other reincarnation lineages, and all adopt the established frameworks for institutionalized reincarnation from earlier models. The new institutions then intertwine these frameworks with variant personal, historical, and geographical

details.[13] It is a process that ensures each reincarnate is seen as an embodiment of a unique, complex institution, with its own history, sphere of influence, and administrative structure, but one that also derives much of his or (rarely) her authority from precedents.

Like many other traditions that have spread mimetically, the reincarnation tradition's origin myth has come to play a crucial role in establishing its authority. This validating narrative has enabled those who adopted the reincarnation model to invoke a prepackaged heritage for their new franchises, one that came with venerable origins and conjured authoritative antecedents. To fulfill this function, the reincarnation tradition's origin narrative had to be repeatedly retold, and this retelling inevitably led to its reduction. The most recent version of the story, which has been in use for at least a few hundred years within the Tibetan tradition and is available on many official websites, merely states that the second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (Rangjung Dorjé's predecessor), inaugurated the reincarnation tradition when he was recognized as Düsum Khyenpa's rebirth.

In these retellings of the reincarnation tradition's story, the simplification of the origin narrative works symbiotically with another key narrative trend: anachronism. Those retelling this institution's story attribute the models and infrastructure of reincarnation's most recent and advanced stage to its entire history.[14] Although there is little evidence for it in texts composed during their lifetimes, in these stories, early reincarnates are enthroned, write prediction letters, and have their spiritual authority acknowledged by political leaders.[15]

The simple tale of the second Karmapa's ritualistic recognition enables commentators to superimpose a later, more developed and institutionalized version of reincarnation—the version they know—onto its earliest chapters. And, reciprocally, the tendency to superimpose these later forms onto earlier stages of the tradition's development has helped to entrench the story that the second Karmapa manifested the reincarnation institution in its complete form.

While Tibetan authors have focused on the reincarnation's continuities, external commentators have focused on its disruptions. When Chinese sources discussed the advent of reincarnates, they too focused on the Karmapas but tended to attribute the Karmapas' status and influence to their relationship with the Yuan Court. The Karmapas' certification by emperors, the Chinese sources argue, created a new connection and, therefore, a new institution that was entirely dependent on its relationship with outsiders.[16] Several Western scholars have further extended this reading of history, contending that it was the reincarnates' relationship with external political figures that solidified their establishment. Perhaps the first to present this argument was Franz Michael, in his book *Rule by Incarnation*, published in 1982.[17] The next year, in 1983, Turrell Wylie published an influential

paper on the Karmapas and reincarnation that argued for a similar disruptive and politically focused "origin" of the tradition. Wylie insisted that the Karmapas, and the other reincarnation institutions that followed them, were essentially political entities set up by the Mongol court and maintained by other, later, foreign rulers to manipulate Tibetan politics. According to Wylie, the reincarnation institutions were established properly when the Mongols invited Rangjung Dorjé to court, and they did this for political reasons. They had been ruling Tibet through the regency of a rival lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, the Sakya, and, he argues, they were looking to replace the Sakya with "a new sectarian hierarch."[18]

Other scholars focusing on Tibet's political rather than cultural or social history have repeated Wylie's assertion.[19] But as this book will show, this external and political description of reincarnation is problematic for a number of reasons, not least because it—ironically, like the traditional origin story—obscures the tradition's gradual development.

RANGJUNG DORJÉ AND REINCARNATION

Despite their very different methodologies, these two versions of the reincarnation tradition's history demonstrate a singular and important point: namely, the reasons for its development are so numerous and complex that many things could be presented as the primary reason for its development. Rather than continuing this particular custom by pretending to present *the* definitive explanation for the convention's development, this book will approach the subject from a different, more domestic perspective. It will examine how one life, that of Rangjung Dorjé, impacted the traditions and institutions of reincarnation.

Examining his life will not tell the whole story of this phenomenon, but it will make a significant contribution to our understanding of its development. Within his lifetime, there was a significant shift in the tradition's practice. Before Rangjung Dorjé, past-life narratives were not associated with specific religious traditions, rituals, institutions, narratives, or places. There was no expectation that a series of reincarnations would continue; there was no accepted mechanism for the passing of property from one generation to the next; and there was no political support for the recognition and enthronement of reincarnates. All these extensions to the tradition started during Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime, many at his instigation.

Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime was, furthermore, the only period in which people writing about the reincarnation tradition detailed these developments. Shortly after his death—or perhaps even before it—those telling his story began to

simplify and mythologize it. In this mythologizing, complexities, doubts, and missteps were excised from the narrative.

The details these later storytellers abandoned can, in the main, be brought down to the stuff of much mundane history: the intersection of historical circumstances and human agency. The specific historical circumstances that influenced these events included the social, economic, and environmental upheavals of Mongol rule in Tibet, which created the space for new traditions to emerge, and the subsequent patronage of the Karmapa tradition by the Mongol court. They also include the Buddhist and Tibetan narratives that Rangjung Dorjé inherited, the influence of localized institutions on the Plateau's politics, and its cultural geography. These historical circumstances worked symbiotically with Rangjung Dorjé's promotional and political activities on behalf of the Karmapa lineage. Rangjung Dorjé took being a Karmapa seriously and dedicated much of his writing and other activities to establishing what this status meant, what the Karmapa's story had been, and what it would become. Moreover, he worked to integrate this narrative within enduring institutions, such that their continued existence would command the presence of a Karmapa.

Establishing what his fundamental intentions were at any given point is clearly beyond the capacity of any historical, literary, or philosophical enquiry. But through his writings, we can investigate how he wanted to communicate these intentions and his personal circumstances. His lifelong literary habit created a oeuvre that was vast (especially for a person who repeatedly reflected on his struggles to obtain paper) and varied. And thanks to a team led by Alek Zenkar Rinpoche—who collected, digitized, and published Rangjung Dorjé's sixteen-volume *Collected Works* in the early 2000s[20]—the world now has easier access to it.

The *Collected Works* include his most influential and reproduced works, those that systematized the two pillars of the Kagyü tradition: the yoga practices called "the six dharmas of Nāropā" (about which the third Karmapa wrote perhaps his most famous work, *Profound Inner Meaning*) and the related teachings on the nondual view of *mahāmudrā*.[21] The study of any of these texts could provide an insight into the immense contribution that Rangjung Dorjé made to Tibet's intellectual history. He lived during a time in which Tibetan Buddhism's systems of thought were being codified and canonized. Along with his contemporaries Butön Rinchen Drup (1290–1364) and Longchen Rabjampa (1308–1364), he was intensely involved in this process, and his abiding influence is evidenced by a continuing engagement with his works by Buddhist students and scholars.[22] A complete overview of his contribution to Tibet's intellectual tradition would fill at least as many volumes as his *Collected Works*.

Given the impact it had on the Plateau's cultural, social, political, and economic life, Rangjung Dorjé's contribution to the reincarnation tradition was easily as important as his literary efforts. But while the intent to transform Tibet's intellectual

life is evident in his schematic writing, there is no indication his aspirations for the reincarnation tradition went beyond establishing his own identity as a reincarnate and a Karmapa. It is, therefore, in this writing about identity that the most clues to the reincarnation tradition's development can be found.

Within his *Collected Works*, the writing that says most about his personal and lineal identity are the birth stories (*jātaka*), biographies, autobiographies, and poetry. Apart from his treatises on *mahāmudrā*, one of his most heralded compositions has been his rewriting and collation of the Buddha's past-life tales, the *Birth Stories of the Teacher*.[23] Less well-known, but perhaps more important for the development of the reincarnation tradition, were the biographies and *jātaka*-influenced past-life tales he wrote about early Kagyü lineage members, and especially the early Karmapas. Those collating his *Collected Works* also found rare texts by Rangjung Dorjé on the life stories of both his predecessors as well as remembrances of his own previous lives, an account of his interlife journey between Karma Pakshi's death and Rangjung Dorjé's birth, and an autobiography written in verse. In different ways, all of these works are musings on his and the Karmapas' identity.

The two main styles of poetry in which Rangjung Dorjé composed were praises and songs. Only nine of his praises are extant, but the fact that many of them focus on the places associated with the Karmapas as opposed to buddhas, deities, or gurus represents an intriguing departure from tradition. His songs are much more numerous. Tibetans had been composing and singing songs, which they colloquially called *glu* and honorifically called *mgur*, since before the introduction of Buddhism, but these terms had more recently become associated with the yogi-poets of the Kagyü, including, most famously, Milarépa (ca. 1052–ca. 1135). The yogis wishing to emulate Milarépa sang songs they claimed were direct expressions of *mahāmudrā*. These songs were usually composed and performed extemporaneously, and in Rangjung Dorje's case, this meant they often present a much less polished version of his life events than do his more formal compositions. Their colophons note that many of them were created either on the road or in temporary abodes, and as he used whatever was around—usually the environment—as their main subject, they often read like poetic postcards from his this-worldly and visionary travels through diaphanous landscapes.

TEXTS IN TIME AND SPACE

The biographies and songs may present themselves as an obvious source of insights into the reincarnation tradition's development, but figuring out how to analyze them has been a more complicated process. To begin with, it is striking

how much they blur the lines between religious text, historical testimony, and literature.

Unlike other religious texts, these texts do not rely on an hermeneutic circle, by which "we must understand in order to believe, but we must believe in order to understand."[24] Instead, they fulfill what Paul Ricoeur describes in his influential work *Memory, History, Forgetting* as "the very heart of documentary proof," "the typical formulation of testimony," "the witness's triple declaration: (1) I was there; (2) believe me; (3) if you don't believe me, ask someone else."[25] The problem they present for contemporary readers, however, is that as *vestigia* of a very different imaginary, accepting the texts' testimony as history is problematic. The texts interweave externally verifiable events with past-life memories, visions, and fantastical lands. They reorganize time and space in very unhistorical ways. They are, in other words, an example of what Peter Schwieger calls Tibetan "history as myth."[26] That is to say, the recording of historical testimonies that include trans-life narratives, such as past-life memories, predictions, and the workings of cause and effect, take testimony out of historical time and place it in mythical time, a temporality in which (as Ricoeur suggests) symbolism and "origins" have primacy over events and historical "beginnings."[27]

One well-used way of approaching Tibetans' use of history-as-myth has been to approach testimonial writing as faulty memoir; to extract as many verifiable facts from such writing as possible and discard the rest. Given the abundance of Tibetan-language life and historical narrative writing and the relative dearth of archival materials, this approach is understandable. But as Schwieger has also pointed out, history-as-myth narratives reflect the perceptions of their authors, and "perception also works by assigning significance."[28] To merely extract material facts from these works would be to lose their historical, religious, and spatial contexts, to drain the shared pool of cultural knowledge that made them understandable to their intended audience. It would also mean appropriating the texts to a material reading of history on the basis of what could be called the "functionalist fallacy": suggesting, in other words, that they were intentionally created to serve the function of providing historically verifiable facts for later readers—a suggestion that ignores their obvious multiplicity of creative and soteriological purposes.[29]

Another, arguably more productive, approach is to take seriously the symbiosis of society, culture, and literature evident in these works. This is the method developed by the Shakespeare scholar Stephen Greenblatt and other practitioners of New Historicism, who analyze literature by viewing works as socially and culturally embedded texts and also as cohesive works of art.[30] This means recognizing that these compositions are not just archives of past events but are also intentional

artistic creations. Approaching the compositions in this way emphasizes their literary as opposed to archival nature; the texts sometimes ignore momentous historical events and often focus on domestic or even mental events like insights and visions. This approach also means recognizing that the "Rangjung Dorjé" we encounter in these works is a literary construct, a protagonist whose narrative tells the story of a life rather than representing all that life.

But after establishing this framework, how should the texts be read? To date, most literary analyses of Tibetan historical literature have been formal, which is to say they have focused on its structure—its format, meter, metaphors, and so forth.[31] These are important attributes of literature, which influence its production and reception, but they are not the sum total of literary experience.

Another way to approach Rangjung Dorjé's biographies and songs, one that is more conducive to establishing the cultural contexts in which they were created, is through a thematic reading. Rangjung Dorjé's explication of personal identity presents itself as an obvious theme to investigate, as does his soteriology. But there are two other interrelated themes that are even more pervasive than identity and liberation and, indeed, underpin them. These two themes are time and space: chronology and location, when and where, history and geography. Time and space are not only fundamental to the genres of biography and song, but they also focus on testimony and, therefore, highlight the tension in these works between myth and history. After all, what is the sentence "I was there" but a claim to have existed (I) in time (was) and space (there)?

In order to contextualize these testimonials thoroughly, it will not be enough to merely explicate time and space in these works; the reading will also need to emphasize the correspondence of these themes. Events, experiences, and perceptions do not occur either temporally or spatially: they occur in the space/time continuum. When expressed this way, this statement seems obvious. Nevertheless, much of the writing on the reincarnation tradition's development to date—and, it could be argued, pre-modern Tibetan historical scholarship more generally—has prioritized the temporal over the spatial. It has concentrated, for example, on the tensions between the tradition's mythical "origins" and its historic "beginnings."

In many ways, this is understandable. As Ricoeur argued in a 1984 work, *Time and Narrative,* moving from lived events to narratives of the past is how we arrange events and give them meaning.[32] And the multiplicity of temporalities in the reincarnation tradition's development—the variety of narratives and the past-life tales within these stories—seem to have concentrated historians' attentions on the temporal.

It could also be argued, however, that this multiplicity highlights the importance of space for the development of this institution. Multiplicity insinuates space.

Space, as the geographer Doreen Massey suggests, is "a simultaneity of stories-so-far."[33] Approaching narratives in space/time foregrounds not only the tradition's multiplicity but also the relationships of mutual recognition that corroborated the reincarnates' testimonies. As Massey explains, "relations can only be fully recognized by thinking fully spatially."[34] Without space, it is impossible to establish the networks of spiritual authority that validated Rangjung Dorjé's identity as a Karmapa.

Before introducing space into this study of historical literature, however, we need to determine what kind of space should be introduced. This should not be the negative space described by Ricoeur and other philosophers like Gaston Bachelard and Michel de Certeau,[35] which Michel Foucault complained had been made "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" in contrast to the "richness, fecundity, life, dialectic" of time.[36] It is not "the negation of time,"[37] but rather its coefficient.

This relationship to time means that it is not equivalent to the Sanskrit term *ākāśa* (Tib. *nam mkha'*), which is often translated by the term "space" and defined as "the absence of obstruction."[38] Rather, combined space and time evokes the idea of "abodes" (Skt. *nivāsa*; Tib *gnas*), which is prevalent within the descriptions of past, present, and future lives in the Buddhist tradition. One of the ten powers that a Buddha achieves on the path of awakening, for example, is "the power to remember past abodes."[39] As Donald Lopez remarks in his analysis of the Buddha's awakening narrative, "knowledge of former abodes . . . is the memory of one's own former lives."[40] If this statement—a gentle nudge in time's favor—is true, then the reverse must also be true: the memory of former lives is the knowledge of former abodes, inhabited sites, bodies born, lives lived, and deaths experienced in space/time.

As will become evident in this study, the idea of "abiding," of creating a space of continued existence, was central to the reincarnation tradition's enduring appeal to Tibetans. These connections were enacted in the sites the reincarnates occupied, and in the settings of cultural production. The invention of the Karmapa institution was not merely dependent on a temporal narrative of successive reincarnates; it required the coeval production of a narrative space. The easiest link to make between multiple lives is that they inhabit the same spaces, the same monasteries, the same thrones, the same black hats. Places—which, like individuals, are related to each other through space—perpetuate memories beyond individual lifetimes, and over these lifetimes they create multilayered geographies in which beings abide. The geographies of the reincarnation tradition include a variety of overlapping maps: local understandings of place, political maps of the Mongol Empire, and cultural geographies.

Tibet's cultural geographies have sustained the reincarnation tradition. The reincarnates' narratives were set within both the pre-Buddhist traditions that peopled the Plateau with gods and spirits and the developing networks of Buddhist sacred sites that were understood to be the abodes of tantric deities. They were also set within a vast cosmologic expanse of other worlds, realms, dimensions, and variant temporalities. As Jan Nattier has noted, the Buddhist and Hindu cosmology was "one of the broadest perspectives of time and space before modern physics."[41] Reincarnates claimed knowledge of these spaces through past-life memories, visions, and predictions, and this vast perspective empowered them.

Acknowledging the cosmographic worldview of the participants in Rangjung Dorjé's writing and the development of the reincarnation tradition is important because they are both embedded within this greater vision. Rangjung Dorjé's autobiographies, for example, are set between two worlds. In them, he presents himself as a visionary who places just as much store in dreams and apparitions as he does in everyday appearances. This access to this visionary world—or more precisely his ability to convince others of his access to this visionary world—also provided him with great authority in a land of believers. This belief—or at least the performance of this belief in his writing—was the primary source of the authority of the reincarnation tradition. During his lifetime, even emperors were believers.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into two parts. Before setting off on Rangjung Dorjé's multifaceted journey from Ladep to Xanadu in part II, part I establishes some of the major precedents and influences on Karmapa reincarnation lineage's development. It does this by examining four of the institution's elements: its narratives, lineages, communities, and setting.

Chapter 1, "Lifetimes," examines the Karmapas' temporal narrative. It tells the multi-life tale of the first three Karmapas, and then looks at how its narrative was constructed. To do this, it examines how Buddhist "selves" are created in life writing through temporal narratives. It then examines how these narratives can be extended over multiple lives and through the preservation of texts.

The second chapter, "Lineages," continues the focus on time by investigating the longstanding narratives of lineage into which the Karmapas' story was threaded: family lineages; monastic, Mahāyāna, and Tantric Buddhist lineages; and the lineages of manifestations, particularly those associated with the celestial bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. The third chapter, "Communities," identifies the social and political environments in which the Karmapa institutions were accepted, supported, and maintained. These communities ranged from local Tibetan

monasteries and villages to larger political entities like the Mongol Empire. "Landscapes," chapter 4, explores the relationship between the development of the reincarnation tradition and the Tibetan physical and imagined geography.

After establishing the scene for the developments in Rangjung Dorjé's life in part I, part II follows his life's journey. Its four sections align with the traditional chapters of a Tibetan biography: birth, childhood and education, retreat and teaching career, and death. The tale begins, in chapter 5, in the moments after the second Karmapa's death. It then analyzes Rangjung Dorjé's description of his journey to the next life, his childhood, Orgyenpa's recognition of him as Karma Pakshi's reincarnation, and his early training. In chapter 6, he leaves Orgyenpa's hermitage because of political upheavals and makes his way to the Karmapas' primary seat, Tsurpu Monastery, near Lhasa, where he spends his late childhood and adolescence. In chapter 7, at age eighteen, he takes full ordination and begins to travel. His first destinations are the Karmapas' other two seats: the Karma and Kampo Nénang Monasteries. He also journeys to the sacred mountains Khawa Karpo and Tsari. Between these excursions, back in central Tibet, he composes his most famous works, including the *Profound Inner Meaning* and the *Birth Stories of the Teacher*.

The last chapter, chapter 8, begins with Rangjung Dorjé in some of the deepest and longest retreats of his life in Tibet's southern borderlands. But he is soon forced to return to central Tibet to mediate between a group of rebels and members of the ruling Mongol-Sakya alliance. He spends the rest of his life between retreat and political obligations. In 1329, the Mongol emperor summons him to the capitals. He eventually arrives in Dadu nearly two years later, during the short reign of Irinjibal (1326–1332, r. 1332), and witnesses the enthronement of the last Great Khan, Toghon Temür (1320–1370, r. 1333–1370), who becomes his student. Once he becomes a member of the Great Khan's court, he is only allowed to return to Tibet briefly in 1334. He dies in Xanadu in the summer of 1339.

Death would be the end of the story for most, but just as Rangjung Dorjé's origins proved ambiguous, so does his passing. For, as this last chapter will explore, according to his biographers, his death was nothing more than a tactical and conscious that facilitated his escape from the emperor's decree that he stay in the capital. It enabled him, through rebirth, to return to his beloved mountains. As his story ended, a new chapter was begun.

NOTES

1. *Xanadu* is a Latinized form of the Chinese word 上都, or Shangdu, which means "upper capital" (Tib. Shong tu, Shang du, and other variants). For recognition's sake, it will be called Xanadu in this book.

2. Rang byung rdo rje, *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam* (Bidung, Bhutan: Kunchhap, 1983), page 177, line 3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. *ca, Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'gur* [sic] *thor bu*, in (Mthsur phu (Tsurpu), Tibet: Mkhan po lo yag bkra shis, 2006), page 394 lines 3–4. Page and line numbers for Tibetan texts will henceforth be indicated by two adjacent numbers, for example, 394.3–4.

3. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. *nga, Rnam thar tshigs bcad ma*, 377.

4. During the latter part of the Mongol Empire, there were two words for rulers: subordinate rulers were called *qan* and the emperor ruling the Yuan Dynasty in the east was called the *qa'an*. For ease of understanding, this book uses *khan* rather than *qan* and renders *qa'an* as "Great Khan." See Christopher P. Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 302.

5. Ch. 大元帝國, Da Yuan Diguo; Mong. Mongolyn Ezent Güren.

6. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 203.2–3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'gur,* 414.6–415.1.

7. Peter Schwieger notes that it was only the Mongols' summons of the fourth Karmapa that referred to the Karmapas as reincarnates: *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 18. In making this claim, he disagrees with Turrell Wylie, who insists the reincarnation institution was inaugurated by the third Karmapa's imperial summons: "Reincarnation: A Political Innovation in Tibetan Buddhism," in *Contributions on Tibetan and Buddhist Religion and Philosophy: Proceedings of the Csoma de Koros Symposium*, ed. Louis Ligeti (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1983), 584–585.

8. The various concepts of reincarnation in pre-Buddhist Tibet have been investigated in Anne-Marie Blondeau, "Que notre enfant revienne! Un rituel méconnu pour les enfants morts en bas-âge," in *Les habitants du toit du monde: Hommage à Alexander W. McDonald*, ed. Samten Karmay and Philippe Sagen (Paris: Nanterre Société d' Ethnologie, 1997), 193–220; Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38–50; and Brandon Dotson, "The Dead and Their Stories: Preliminary Remarks on the Place of Narrative in Tibetan Religion," in *Tibet after Empire: Culture, Society, and Religion between 850–1000*, ed. Cristoph Cüppers, Rob Mayer, and Michael Walter (Lumbini, Nepal: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2013), 51–83. Yoshiro Imaeda examined a Duhuang manuscript that is an early attempt to propagate the Buddhist idea of death and rebirth in Tibet: "The *History of the Cycle of Birth and Death*: A Tibetan Narrative from Dunhuang," in *Contributions to the Cultural History of Early Tibet*, ed. Brandon Dotson and Matthew Kapstein (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 103–182. This narrative will be examined in chapter 1.

9. José Cabezón, "On Tulku Lineages," *Revue d'etudes tibétaines* 38 (2017): 1–28; Leonard van der Kuijp, "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," in *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. Martin Brauen (Chicago: Serindia, 2005), 15–30.

10. The tripartite classification of a buddha's ontology are discussed in Paul Griffiths, *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), and John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

11. While there has not been a full-length study of the reincarnation tradition overall, there have been several studies of how the reincarnation model was applied in specific instances. For example Hildegard Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty: The Samding Dorjé Phagmo of Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Elija Ary, "The Westernization of Tulkus," in *Little Buddhas: Children and Childhoods in*

Buddhist Texts and Traditions, ed. Vanessa Sasson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 398–427; Jay Holt Valentine, "The Lords of the Northern Treasures: The Development of the Tibetan Institution of Rule by Successive Incarnations" (PhD thesis, University of Virginia, 2013); and Daniel Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born: Padmasambhava in the History of Tibet's Golden Age* (Boston: Wisdom, 2016). Several articles have also addressed the tradition's early development: van der Kuijp, "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," 15–30; Cabezón, "On Tulku Lineages," 1–28; Daniel Hirshberg, "Karmic Foreshadowing on the Path of Fruition: Narrative Devices in the Biographies of Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer," *Bulletin of Tibetology* 45, no. 1 (2009): 53–78; and Daniel Hirshberg, "A Post-Incarnate Usurper?: Inheritance at the Dawn of Catenate Reincarnation in Tibet," *Revue d'etudes tibétaines* 38 (2017): 65–83.

12. The idea of the "invention of tradition" came to scholarly prominence through a collection of essays edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger: *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Van der Kuijp reflected on the reincarnation tradition's status as an "invented tradition" in "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," 15.

13. These patterns of development can be seen, for example, in Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, and van der Kuijp, "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas."

14. Michel Foucault discusses the same process in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 25. Daniel Hirshberg describes this process in the early accounts of Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer's (1124–1192) past-life memories with an eloquence that deserves to be quoted: "The blaze of resolved synchrony," he writes, "obscures the diachronic process of development itself," in "Delivering the Lotus-Born: Historiography in the Tibetan Renaissance" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012), 2.

15. Several English language histories of the Karmapas repeat such traditional claims including Mick Brown, *The Dance of 17 Lives: The Incredible True Story of Tibet's 17th Karmapa* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), 122–144; and Lama Kunsang, Lama Pema, and Marie Aubèle, *History of the Karmapas: Odyssey of the Tibetan Masters with the Black Crown* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2012), 41. The trope of a recognition letter can also be found in later Tibetan versions of Rang byung rdo rje's biography. See, for example, Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po* (Pe cin [Beijing], China: Mi rigs dpe skrung khang, 1981), 106.

16. Qingying Chen analyzes the descriptions of his journeys to Xanadu and Dadu in "Ka ma pa Rang jiong duo ji liang ci jin jing shi lue," *Zhongguo Zangzue* 3 (1988): 89–99.

17. Franz Michael, *Rule by Incarnation: Tibetan Buddhism and Its Role in Society and State* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982).

18. Wylie, "Reincarnation," 582.

19. Schwieger, for example, does not refute Wylie's claim that the Mongols founded the reincarnation institution or that reincarnation institutions are essentially political entities. He does, however, make his argument with considerably more nuance than Wylie. He suggests, for example, that Wylie's claims are made on the basis of "a small base of historical information" and that there were many other factors involved in the tradition's development, including "the promise that the disciple will meet his teacher again in his next life": see *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China*, 18.

20. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*.

21. *Zab mo nang don gyi gzhung*, in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum, ja*:308–360. In Tibetan, the six dharmas of Nāropa are called *nā ro chos drug* and *mahāmudrā* is called *phyag rgya chen po*.

22. For example, Michelle Sorenson, "Making the Old New Again and Again: Legitimation and Innovation in the Tibetan Buddhist Chöd Tradition" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2011); Manfred Seegers, "Lord of the Teachings: The Life and Works of the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje," (MPhil diss., University of Canterbury, 2009); Karl Brunnhölzl, *Luminous Heart: The Third Karmapa on Consciousness, Wisdom, and Buddha Nature* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2009); Karl Brunnhölzl, *In Praise of Dharmadhātu: Nāgārjuna and the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé* (New York: Random House, 2007); Karl Brunnhölzl, *The Center of the Sunlit Sky: Madhyamaka in the Kagyü Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2004); and Kurtis Schaeffer, "The Enlightened Heart of Buddhahood: A Sstudy and Translation of the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje's Work on Tathagatagarbha" (Master's thesis, University of Washington, 1995).

23. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. *kha, Ston pa'i skyes rabs*, :1–666.

24. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 525.

25. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 278.

26. Peter Schwieger, "History As Myth: On the Appropriation of the Past in Tibetan Culture, an Essay in Cultural Studies," in *The Tibetan History Reader*, ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis Schaeffer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 64–68.

27. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 139–140.

28. Schwieger, "History as Myth," 71.

29. I was alerted to the idea of the "functionalist fallacy" by Janet Gyatso's review of three studies of Tibetan autobiography, "Turning Personal: Recent Work on Autobiography in Tibetan Studies," *Journal of Asian Studies* 75, no. 1 (2012): 229–235.

30. For an overview see Catherine Gallagher, and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

31. Examples of this kind of analysis include Ter Ellingson, "The Mandala of Sound: Concepts and Sound Structures in Tibetan Ritual Music" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1979); Per K. Sørensen, *Divinity Secularized: An Inquiry into the Nature and Form of the Songs Ascribed to the Sixth Dalai Lama* (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1990); David Templeman, "Doha, Vajragiti, and Carya Songs," in *Tantra and Popular Religion in Tibet,* ed. Geoffrey Samuel, Hamish Gregor, and Elisabeth Stutchbury, 15–37 (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1994); Roger Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet: Glu, Mgur, Snyan Ngag, and 'Songs of Experience,'" in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger Jackson (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion), 368–392; Victoria Sujata, *Tibetan Songs of Realization: Echoes from a Seventeenth-Century Scholar and Siddha in Amdo* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005); and Lara E. Braitstein, "Saraha's Adamantine Songs: Texts, Contexts, Translations, and Traditions of the Great Seal" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2006).

32. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* vol. 1, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 121–175.

33. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 89.

34. Massey, *For Space*, 39.

35. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin, 2014; first ed. 1958); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, first ed. 1980).

36. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York City: Pantheon, 1980), 70.

37. Massey, *For Space*, 37.

38. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 26.

39. Skt. *pūrva-nivāsa-anusmṛiti-jñāna-bala*; Tib. *sngon gyi gnas rjes su dran pa mkhyen pa'i stobs*.

40. "Memories of the Buddha," in *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Janet Gyatso (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 25.

41. Jan Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), 8.

PART ONE

The Elements of Reincarnation

1

Lifetimes

I may not have studied and reflected in this life,
But as I have trained for many eons,
I do not need to make an effort now . . .
This may be the truth, but I may be joking.

Rangjung Dorjé,
Khyung Dzong Hermitage, Tsurpu, 1298, aged fourteen[1]

Rangjung Dorjé was raised with the idea that he had been other people living in other times. These people were not just abstract "others" but identifiable individuals. He had been people with dates and stories, people whom people he knew had known, people who lived where he lived, people whose habits had become his cultural inheritance. His extended personal history was not merely a good excuse—as the quote above suggests—for a fourteen-year-old to get out of studying. It was also the foundational story of his reincarnation tradition. Without this multi-life narrative, there was no tradition. But a narrative that stretches over centuries with a multi-bodied protagonist must necessarily contend with complicated contents and contexts.

The primary vessels for this story are the biographies, autobiographies, and past-life tales composed by the early Karmapas and their associates. These works organize the details of the Karmapas' lives. They move from the telling of one event to another, the measuring of time through lived experience, and by so doing they create what Paul Ricoeur and others call a "narrative identity."[2] But the Karmapas' story also undermines some of the assumptions that underpin the very idea of a narrative identity. In their written lives, persons are not delimited by births and deaths. They are much less and much more than this. The Buddhist

concepts of selflessness and multiple lives allow for more fluid, nuanced, and compound identities than those that underpin Ricoeur's presentation; rather than birth and death marking the limits of a person's existence, they mark infinity's bodily metronome.

Not only does the Karmapas' story stretch the boundaries of personal identity in this way, it also blurs the distinction between biography and history, history and myth. The Karmapas' story is, in many ways, history as well as biography. It is told as first-person witness accounts of events that, as Ricoeur explains in his analysis of historical narrative, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, "stand for the past as having been."[3] It contained stories that were remembered at the expense of others that were forgotten; and it was adjusted in later redactions to account for developments in ideology and taste. But the presentation of a single person's narrative as a several-hundred-year-old history depends on beliefs about person, time, and place that are unverifiable and, therefore, usually counted as myth rather than history. These were the same beliefs that underpinned the development of the reincarnation tradition. To understand the Karmapas' story and the influence it had on the reincarnation tradition's development, it is, therefore, necessary to grapple with the construction and consequences of these ideas and the narrative they inspired. How was a story that blurred so many lines between individual and group identity, biography and history, and history and myth comprehensible to its audience? How did it become influential? And how was it preserved?

THE KARMAPAS' STORY

Most life stories begin with a birth and the backstory of the protagonist's family. The most usual way to begin the Karmapas' story is with a backstory too, but rather than tracing their individual familial linages their backstory traces their shared religious lineage.

The early Karmapas were members of the Marpa Kagyü, "the oral lineage of Marpa," which was founded in Tibet by the translator and yogi Marpa Chökyi Lodrö (ca. 1012–1097) during the "later diffusion" of Tibetan Buddhism.[4] The "later diffusion" refers to a period of renewed exchanges between Tibetans and Indian Buddhists, which lasted from the tenth to twelfth centuries. It led to the introduction of "new tantras" to Tibet, which formed the core practices of a group of new religious lineages in Tibet; along with the Marpa Kagyü this group also included the Sakya and Kadam lineages.

Marpa made his reputation as a translator and teacher after traveling to India and studying with the *mahāsiddha* (great siddha) Maitrīpā (eleventh century) and,

purportedly, Maitrīpā's teacher, the famous *mahāsiddha* Nāropā (eleventh century).[5] Nāropā was, in turn, the student of the mysterious Tilopa. Tilopa is said to have received instructions in a vision from Vajradhara, the form the Buddha takes to teach the Vajrayāna, or tantric Buddhism.

The principle practices Marpa's Indian teachers taught him were the six dharmas (or yogas) of Nāropā and *mahāmudrā*. The ideas and tradition of *mahāmudrā* developed in India between the seventh and tenth centuries. The term *mahāmudrā* means "the great seal." As one historian of Tibet, Matthew Kapstein, explains, *mahāmudrā* is "so-called because its realization is said to delimit all possibilities of experience, sacred and profane, just as the royal seal brings closure to an act of government."[6]

The Marpa-Kagyü presentation of *mahāmudrā* is threefold: reality itself (ground *mahāmudrā*), the path to reality's realization (path *mahāmudrā*) and the ultimate realization of reality (fruition *mahāmudrā*). This ultimate realization is nondual wisdom; a state in which there is neither a subject perceiving an external world nor an external world being perceived by a knowing subject. Perceiver and perceived are merely the play of the awakened mind.[7]

The practice of Nāropā's tantric yogas were a means for experiencing *mahāmudrā*. As *mahāmudra* was said to be "beyond speech, thought, and expression,"[8] unable to be understood through logic, ritual, or moral conduct, it was especially hard to teach. Students must be virtually awakened to realize it, so they were first encouraged to develop their abilities through yogas.

Members of this lineage in both India and Tibet were renowned for recounting their meditational experiences in song. The most well-known of the tradition's Tibetan singing yogis was—and still is—Marpa's student Milarépa. The story of his difficult life and eventual liberation, along with the songs he sang along the way, were already iconic by Rangjung Dorjé's time.[9] Milarépa's story recounts how he began his religious career by learning black magic and killing his enemies, and it was not until he became Marpa's student that he developed realizations. After training with Marpa for years, he went off to meditate in the mountains, where he attained awakening and began teaching his own students.

Within the Kagyü tradition, Milarépa's story quickly became not only well-loved but paradigmatic. Practitioners like Rangjung Dorjé were expected, as he recalls in one of his songs, to "do as Mila[repa] did":[10] to practice yoga in the mountains, to sing songs, and to attain realization. They were also expected to imitate Milarépa's key religious practice of guru devotion, or guru yoga. Milarépa's practice of guru devotion is a central theme of his story; his relationship with Marpa transformed him, and later he transformed the lives of his own students. A profound relationship between teacher and student, and the associated practice of guru devotion,

has played a central role in all lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, but after the example set by Milarépa, it became especially important in the Kagyü. This focus on the guru-student relationship, in turn, has affected the lineage's character in numerous ways.

One of these modes of influence was the power it granted to individual gurus to transform the lineage, and the classic example of this was the way Gampopa Sönam Rinchen (1079–1153), one of Milarépa's two main students, was allowed to transform the Kagyü lineage. Before meeting Milarépa in middle age, Gampopa had trained as a monk in the Kadam tradition, a monastically oriented new-transmission-era lineage established in Tibet by followers of the Indian monk Atiśa Dīpamkara (982–1055). Milarépa became Gampopa's primary guru, teaching him Nāropā's yogas and *mahāmudrā*. But Gampopa did not adopt Milarépa's lay, mountain-dwelling lifestyle or even follow Marpa's example as a yogi-householder. Instead, Gampopa remained a monk and founded Daklha Gampo Monastery in Dakpo, southern Tibet, where his students were encouraged to practice yoga and monasticism. Their lineage became known as the Dakpo Kayü.[11]

Düsum Khyenpa, the monk later known as the first Karmapa, was one of Gampopa's leading students. He was born in Dreshö, eastern Tibet, in 1110, took vows at age sixteen, and at nineteen left home to pursue his studies in central Tibet. Like Gampopa, he too practiced monasticism in the Kadam tradition for years before traveling to Gampo Monastery as a thirty-year-old and then spending decades engaged in Kagyü practices under Gampopa's tutelage. Later in life, he established three monastic institutions of his own that would become mainstays of the Karmapa reincarnation institution: Karma and Kampo Nénang Monasteries in eastern Tibet, and Tsurpu Monastery in central Tibet, near Lhasa. Along with his monastic practices, he also took many tantric empowerments and was, therefore, connected to the networks of tantric relationships that crossed the Tibetan Plateau. Through these networks, he developed a reputation as someone who could remember former lives, generate multiple contemporary emanations, and see the future.

Claims that a person has clairvoyance and the ability to generate emanations are the kind of cultural details that are easy to skip over in historical narratives. But it is pertinent to remember how important such claims have been, not only (and obviously) to the reincarnation tradition's development but also to the larger Buddhist tradition. The religion holds that it is possible for non-Buddhists to experience glimpses of other lives, but only those with very high levels of realization know the details of these lives and, more importantly, the workings of cause and effect that create them.[12] Understanding the workings of cause and effect that leads to rebirth is one of the highest realizations a Buddhist can achieve; this was,

after all, the realization the Buddha attained under the tree in Bodhgaya, in the first part of the night, before his complete awakening at dawn.[13] Without this kind of knowledge it was impossible to remember more than a glimpse of past lives or how the bodies of such lives could be emanated. The fact that Düsum Khyenpa made such claims suggests a high level of personal confidence. The fact that his claims were accepted and recorded by those in his social circle suggests that his claims were not considered delusional. The importance his society placed on these skills was even reflected in his name; Düsum Khyenpa, more of a title than a name, means "knower of the three times."[14]

Düsum Khyenpa is one of the first Tibetans to have his impressions of other lives recorded, and compared to the later descriptions of other peoples' other lives, they are unusual. Unlike other Tibetans, he remembered lives lived far away from his cultural sphere, on far-flung continents in different eons and unusual bodies. The synchronic emanations he claimed were still idiosyncratic but more goal-oriented; in these lives, he was either helping specific students or developing his abilities in particular tantric practices. Perhaps surprisingly, the records of his predictions for future lives are quite detailed too, and they cover a much narrower geographic and cultural sphere: one life, his biographies record, would be lived as a tantric practitioner in northeast India, another in southern India, and yet another short life would occur in Lhodrak, a region of southern Tibet.[15]

The next Karmapas' life did not match any of his predictions. Düsum Khyenpa's long life ended in 1193 at Tsurpu Monastery. Karma Pakshi, the next body in the Karmapa body rosary, was born in eastern Tibet, at Satö Kyilétsak near Dégé, almost a century after Düsum Khyenpa's birth and a decade after his death, in 1204 or 1206.[16]

Karma Pakshi slowly gained a reputation as Düsum Khyenpa's emanation. Following a vision, one of Düsum Khyenpa's grand-students, Pomdrakpa Sönam Dorjé (1170–1249), recognized Karma Pakshi as Düsum Khyenpa's emanation when he was a teenager. Karma Pakshi himself claimed to be one of Düsum Khyenpa's emanations too, and he repeated his predecessor's claim of being one of several synchronous emanations. In his thirties, he solidified his connection with Düsum Khyenpa, by repairing his predecessor's three monasteries. His association with these monasteries is most probably the source of the first part of the name by which he became known; he was called "Karma" and "Karmapa," "the one from Karma," because of his association with Karma Monastery.[17]

After restoring Karma and Kampo Nénang, Karma Pakshi and many of his family restored and took up residence at Tsurpu Monastery in central Tibet. He lived there through most of his middle age. Then, when he was in his fifties, he was summoned to the court of a Mongol prince named Qubilai (1215–1294;

r. 1260–1294). At that time, the Mongols were showing a particular interest in collecting Tibetan *tantrika*s, whom they believed possessed special powers, and Karma Pakshi's invitation was based upon his perceived magical skills. As Charles E. Manson's analysis of Karma Pakshi's fragmentary biographies suggests, by the time Qubilai summonsed Karma Pakshi to his court, the fifty-year-old Karmapa had developed a not-very-positive impression of the Mongols. He lived with "the communal memories of the invasion of 1240" and had been forced to flee "from marauding Mongols in east Tibet" as a young man. Nevertheless, when Qubilai's envoy arrived at Tsurpu to summons him, Karma Pakshi left for the Mongol prince's court. His biographers suggest he only left Tsurpu after a vision in which the Glorious Goddess, Penden Lhamo, told him to leave. But as Manson reports, Karma Pakshi's autobiography does not speak of his motives. "It simply states that he was at Tsurpu when an envoy was sent by Qubilai . . . requiring the lama's presence at court [and] after initial prevarication . . . [he] decided to accept the invitation."[18]

Karma Pakshi met Qubilai in the borderlands between Tibet and China at some time between 1250 and 1255 and stayed in his entourage for several years.[19] Then, without full explanation to Qubilai or the readers of his biographies, he left, returned to central Tibet, and in 1256, accepted an invitation from Qubilai's older brother Möngke (1251–1259; r. 2151–1259), the Great Khan, to attend his court at Qara Qorum, on the Mongolian steppe, in the west of present-day Mongolia. As Manson has attested, Karma Pakshi's silence on the subject of his departure from Qubilai's court may have been "diplomatic," as he was "always reticent in mentioning his troubled interactions with Qubilai."[20] But as Michelle Sorenson has pointed out, this "was not an unreasonable move on Karma Pakshi's part; Qubilai at this point had no obvious claim to the throne, making Möngke a far more appealing donor."[21]

In Karma Pakshi's reports of his time at Qara Qorum, Möngke is presented not only as a more appealing donor but also as a more able and malleable religious student. By contrast with his diplomatic silence about Qubilai, Karma Pakshi enthuses about Möngke's abilities in Buddhist yoga and the Great Khan's purported acceptance of many Buddhist tenets. Karma Pakshi even claims to have convinced Möngke to stop killing and become vegetarian.[22] But there is no record of this transformation in any non-Tibetan sources, and the massacres of Baghdad, in which Mongol forces killed upward of half a million people, occurred less than a year after Karma Pakshi claims to have brought about this pacific transformation.

While the impact Karma Pakshi had on the court is difficult to assess, the impact his visit to Mongolia had on his and the Karmapas' story is clear. Karma Pakshi's connection to Möngke solidified his reputation and gave him the resources to

enlarge his monasteries. It also changed the name by which he would be known. "Pakshi" is most probably a rendering of the Mongolian word *bagshi*, which meant both "teacher" and "sorcerer," and as Leonard van der Kuijp explains, it was used in Tibet as "a kind of honorific title, in both ecclesiastic and secular contexts, with no definite office or function attached to it."[23]

Shortly after Karma Pakshi received this title, he left his court and returned to Tsurpu Monastery. At around the same time, while on a military campaign in 1259 near the present-day city of Chongqing in southwest China, Möngke died, and following his death, his brothers Qubilai and Ariq Böke (1219–1266) waged a war of succession. The war ended four years later with Qubilai in the ascendancy, and Karma Pakshi in trouble. According to some of his biographers, when Qubilai became the Great Khan, he accused Karma Pakshi of siding with Ariq Böke, tortured him, tried to have him killed, and then subjected him to what the Tibetan commentators describe with horror as an exile "next to an ocean." After this mental torture, he was brought back to endure more physical torture, before he ultimately escaped. In retellings of this story, especially those constructed by later Kagyü writers, Qubilai Khan's attempt to recapture his erstwhile guru became quite fantastic, with Karma Pakshi raising up ephemeral armies to fight back Qubilai Khan's battle-hardened soldiers.[24] But as Manson reports, in Karma Pakshi's own accounts of these altercations, he only refers to one episode of torture.[25]

While Karma Pakshi was first at Möngke's court and then in exile and disgrace, Qubilai had aligned himself with another lineage of Tibetan Buddhists, the Sakya, and established the young head of this lineage, Chögyel Pakpa (1235–1280), as his representative in Tibet. Despite some enmity between the Kagyü and Sakya lineages, Chögyel Pakpa is said to have insisted Qubilai Khan refrain from killing Karma Pakshi and, eventually, according to all reports, the Great Khan and his erstwhile guru effected a reconciliation of sorts. The Karmapa was allowed to return to Tsurpu Monastery at some time in the 1270s. He died there in 1283. Rangjung Dorjé was born less than a year later.

NARRATING A BUDDHIST SELF

On one level, the story just told reads more like a lineage history than an individual's biography. The suggestion of continuity between the early Karmapas' lives and their claims to be simultaneously emanating in other places are easy to skim over, like the claims that Düsum Khyenpa was clairvoyant. But to understand how the reincarnation tradition developed, these claims need to be foregrounded. In this tale, bodies come and go, but the Karmapa consciousness continues.

One of the basic characteristics of person that underpins this presentation is the Buddhist tenet "persons are selfless."[26] This statement may seem counterintuitive at first, for the selflessness of persons seems like an antibiographical contention. In practice, however, this idea does not negate narratives of self any more than it negates the experiences of personhood. It merely reframes them. The self the Buddhist tradition negates is only one kind of self: an ultimate, singular, independent, and unchanging self. The tradition replaces this idea of self with that of a constructed person who arises in dependence on a collection of ever-changing causes and conditions and continues to exist as long as these enabling factors are present. The continuing presence of these factors perpetuates a continuous cycle of deaths and births, before beings eventually awaken and transform from a sentient being into a buddha. In the version of Buddhism to which Rangjung Dorjé ascribed, even this transformation is not the end: buddhas do not cease to exist when they are awakened; their fully awakened consciousness continues. Persons are not defined by the temporal finiteness of their life, activities, and death. They are defined as an infinite continuity.

The term Rangjung Dorjé uses most often to suggest this continuity is "mindstream" (*sems rgyud*), and following the intellectual traditions he inherited, he describes this mindstream in a particular way. We misunderstand the mindstream, he insists, by conceptualizing it as a duality: as a unitary, permanent, and singular subject that perceives multiple objects. Whereas in reality, the mindstream's nature is non-dual. It cannot be separated from the multiplicity of phenomena it experiences as external things and events. As he says in one of his songs:

> Since grasping minds are not real,
> Look at their clear nature.
> Since subjects and objects have no meaning,
> Destroy the consciousness that grasps at duals.
> Since the way things are is uncomplicated,
> Everything is *mahāmudrā*.
> But since the way things are is also endless,
> I sing songs to inspire others.[27]

Experiences, he claims here, are ever-changing, but they only exist apparently. The internal self or subject that experiences lifetimes is not separate from the spaces they conceptualize as external and eternal.

Against this ontological backdrop of unfolding non-dual appearances, Buddhist writers have employed a variety of techniques to create narrative focus in their

work. One of the most common of these is to highlight temporal cycles. In this schema, birth and death mark biographical time in much the same way that the movements of celestial bodies mark calendrical time. This focus on cyclical time is particularly noticeable in Rangjung Dorjé's writing, for he was one of only a handful of premodern Tibetan calendar makers. But his approach to calendars was very different from the approach to them in Ricoeur's production-of-history schema. According to Ricoeur, the use of calendars marks the transition between mythic time and history; mythic time is the time of origins and "once upon a time," and history is the time of calendars.[28] Calendars, Ricoeur suggests, integrate human time with cosmic time, by which he means the movement of celestial bodies, the sun, moon, and stars. If narratives document events in relation to these calendars, the result is history. If they explore "imaginative possibilities" and are only tangentially related to calendars, the result is myth.[29]

This approach makes sense in a contemporary Western context where time, in and of itself, is no longer imbued with any transformative powers. But what if, as in Rangjung Dorjé's case, a calendar is created to explore "imaginative possibilities"? When Rangjung Dorjé made calendars, he did not connect his time to astrological time by measuring the movement of the sun, moon, and stars. He relied on the calculations outlined in the *Kālacakra Tantra* (*Wheel of Time Tantra*) and understood them to be the Buddha's infallible word.[30]

In his commentaries on these practices, Rangjung Dorjé explains that as a practitioner of this tantra, he understood calendars not just as time markers but also as a means of awakening. He accepted the *Kālacakra Tantra*'s claims that how we perceive the ever-rotating wheel of time depends on our insights. When not awakened, we experience it as the ephemeral, unsatisfactory appearances of *saṃsāra*; when awakened, we experience it as the nondual nature of Buddha Kālacakra's mind. To achieve this awakening, he practiced the Kālacakra yogas, in which he visualized links between the cosmos and his body. He believed that cosmic time would syncopate with his breath and the movement of subtle winds around his body's energy channels.[31] He described how to manipulate these winds to change the perception of time (measured through celestial movement) and how the movements of celestial bodies influenced his body. He made calendars so he would know which way his winds were moving.[32]

In his writing on astrology and the *Kālacakra Tantra*, Rangjung Dorjé presents both as parts of a larger Buddhist cosmological tradition that is related to the Abhidharma (higher knowledge) tradition.[33] As Jan Nattier's writing on the subject of time in Buddhism has showed, the Abhidharma tradition combined broader Indian and specifically Buddhist elements to create a vast cosmology. In this cosmology, time and space unfold in increasingly larger cycles; from the

movement of the sun and moon through a day, to the seasonal cycles of a year, to galactic rotations through light and dark eons and the fiery deaths and rebirths of universes. These cosmological cycles then intersect with buddhological cycles, as the Buddha's teachings repeatedly evolve and devolve.[34]

Written as it was during the era of Buddhism's destruction in India, the *Kālacakra Tantra* painted a particularly vivid vision of the Buddhist Dharma's devolution that had been earlier articulated in the Abhidharma tradition.[35] Along with its celestial calculations, this devolutionary vision appears to have had a profound influence on Rangjung Dorjé, who regularly opines that he is an "end-of-time yogi" living in a "dark age."[36] Indeed, he identifies more often as an end-of-time yogi than he does as a Karmapa.

In this conceptual space, the conceptual space in which the Karmapas' narrative was created, not only narratives of persons but the experiences of personhood are constructed from their component parts. Time is represented as a wheel; it spins from day to night, season to season, life to life, eon to eon. In this presentation of time, all stories extend over multiple lives. To begin and end a story with a birth and a death is to tell only part of a tale.

TELLING A MULTI-LIFE TALE

Along with calendars and the cycles of time, another organizing principle upon which Rangjung Dorjé relied to tell the Karmapas' narratives was genre.[37] As the literary theorist John Frow has argued, genres are performative processes rather than definitive entities. They arise out of a combination of older forms of expression, innovation, historical events, and social necessity, and each new performance of them alters their form in some way.[38] Genre performances may take their lead from established patterns, but they redefine them by exposing conventions to new historical and personal conditions. They also sit within larger, interconnected networks of recognized literary formats. In this way, rather than compositions stringently following literary rules, genres are "horizon(s) of expectation, against which any text is read, so they themselves are subsumed within a broader horizon formed by a[n historical] period's system of genres."[39]

In effect, establishing a horizon of expectations acts as a conceptual shortcut for audiences. When those familiar with a "comic book" encounter a work titled "comic book," for example, they develop a concept of what it will entail. Their preconceptions are then either confirmed or denied as they read the book.

Rangjung Dorjé and the early Karmapas' other biographers did something, however, that was a little unusual in premodern Tibet: they combined the scripts of two well-established genres, "liberation stories" (*rnam thar*) and "birth stories"

or *jātaka*s (*skyes rabs*). Liberation stories, which described the liberation of a central Buddhist protagonist, were the primary biography type on the Plateau. The *jātaka*s were, most commonly, popular morality tales of the Buddha's previous lives. By combining them, the Karmapas' biographers changed both modes of storytelling. What is more, the series of reincarnate and lineal biographies that they created to represent the Karmapas helped, in turn, to create a new genre: "golden rosaries" (*gser 'phreng*), or lineal biographies.

Out of these three genres, the liberation-story genre appears to have been the most commonly composed during Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime. It was also the genre designation that Rangjung Dorjé gave to both his autobiographies and to the biographies he wrote about other people. By choosing this descriptor for his work, Rangjung Dorjé was evoking a long history of Tibetan biographical writing.

While they do not use the designator "liberation story," most of the earliest examples of biography in the Tibetan tradition, found in the Dunhuang manuscripts, are stories of liberation.[40] One of these texts is *A History of the Cycle of Birth and Death*, which has been analyzed by the scholar Yoshiro Imaeda and dated to about 800CE.[41] It follows the adventures of Rinchen, who, after his father dies, goes in search of a remedy for death. After visiting many teachers, he finally meets Śakyamuni Buddha, who teaches him how to liberate himself. Another story from the Dunhuang documents, translated by Sam van Schaik and Lewis Doney, tells the tale of a monk named Bapeljam, who endures a variety of trials before his prayers lead to his rebirth in Amitābha's pure land. And yet another narrative found in these documents, translated by Marcelle Lalou in 1936, tells the story of a monk, Namkhé Nyingpo, who attains rebirth in Amitābha's pure land after practicing Buddhism.[42]

When and how these stories of liberation morphed into a genre called "liberation stories" is less clear. The designator "liberation story" is a descriptive translation of the Tibetan word *rnam thar*, which is, in turn, a neologism that was created to represent the Sanskrit term *vimokṣa*. *Vimokṣa* had been used in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism to refer to "complete liberation"[43] from the cycle of existential suffering, of repeated rebirths.

At some point during the period known as the "era of fragmentation," after the dissolution of the Tibetan Empire in the ninth century, this term's semantic field was stretched so that it came to include not only liberation itself but also stories about liberation.[44] At this time, there was no central control on the Tibetan Plateau, and various leaders competed for influence using a variety of martial, religious, and cultural means, including hagiography. These circumstances helped to shape a genre that focused on the spiritual attainments of its protagonists, often expressed through their visions and prophecies, the texts they had studied,

and the monastic and tantric lineages into which they had been inducted.[45] The liberation-story genre emerged from this period as an identifiable phenomenon.

Both the competition between charismatic figures and the production of liberation stories increased during the next period of Tibetan history, the "later diffusion" during which the new tantras where introduced into Tibet from India. This increased production may have been encouraged by new examples in life writing that were being imported from India along with the new tantras. Tibetan yogis looked to the *siddha*s' biographies for inspiration. For Rangjung Dorjé, engaging with these works was even a form of guru yoga practice. He wrote about this approach to the *siddha*s' biographies in one of his songs:

> I seek to generate a single-pointed, pure vision
> In my own pure mind that adores the Buddha's
> Infinite projections, the gurus, through [contemplating]
> Their illuminating liberation stories.[46]

These works, both their form and content, were also a source of literary inspiration. The most obvious formal characteristic the Tibetans borrowed from the *siddha*s' biographies was their episodic structure. Most biographies and autobiographies from this point on followed the pattern established in the *mahāsiddha*s' stories: they begin by explaining the protagonist's family background, then describe his or her birth, the encounter with the guru, the practice of the guru's teaching, realization, the subject's teaching career and his or her death.[47] The Tibetans were also influenced by the content and imagery the *siddha*s used. Like the *siddha*s, their Tibetan followers focused on dreams and visions almost as much as their waking life, for example. They also adopted much of the *siddha*s' visionary images and many of their metaphors.

Despite their influence on his biographies and the Tibetan liberation-story genre more generally, however, the *mahāsiddha*s' stories did not provide Rangjung Dorjé with a model he could use to write about multiple lives. The primary reason for this was, like the story of the Buddha's awakening, they were purported to tell the story of a being's last life; at some point in these stories their protagonist existed the cycle of life, they found liberation, and became a Buddha. To find examples of those who return, he had to look elsewhere.

One source of such tales was the treasure tradition. The treasure tradition developed as a way to reinvigorate the older forms of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingma lineage, as the new tantras rose to prominence. The treasure texts, "unearthed" by this tradition's treasure revealers (*gter ston*), had purportedly been composed during the time of the Tibetan Empire and hidden away for later generations to

find. Ronald Davidson suggests that this practice began when old manuscripts were found in the ruins of imperial-era temples and monasteries but was later used as a method for introducing new religious and historical narratives into Tibet's conservative culture.[48]

It was through these texts that stories about Rangjung Dorjé's hero Padmasambhava developed. In the most developed form of these "liberation stories," Padmasambhava was portrayed as a *siddha* who was invited to Tibet by King Tri Song Détsen (ca. 743–ca. 800) and his guru Śāntarakṣita (725–788) to tame the local gods and spirits that were hostile to Buddhism.[49] As well as taming these gods and spirits, Padmasambhava was then said to have hidden the treasure texts so that they could be found by treasure revealers in the future. Eventually, the treasure texts also came to include descriptions of the treasure finders' past-life involvement in the text's production. And by the twelfth century, at least one treasure finder, Nyangrel Nyima Özer (1124–1194), had filled in the gaps between his treasure-hiding and -finding lives by remembering seventeen lives between them.[50]

This innovation in past-life narratives was well-established by Rangjung Dorjé's time, and there is substantial evidence for its influence on his biographical compositions. Unlike the previous two Karmapas, Rangjung Dorjé was not only aware of the treasure tradition, but also involved in it. [51] He came from a Nyingma family, had lineal connections with treasure finders, and is even remembered as the finder of a treasure text called the *Karma Ḍākinīs' Heart Essence*.[52] It is not clear whether this attribution came from him or arose after his death, but either way the association between him and the text was aided by his repeated insistence—not found among the past-life claims of the previous two Karmapas—that he had lived an imperial-era life as a student of Padmasambhava, as the historically verifiable monk, Gyel Chokyang (eighth century).[53]

The Nyingma was not, however, the only lineage invested in producing multi-life narratives from which Rangjung Dorje could seek inspiration. Members of the Kagyü, Rangjung Dorjé's primary lineage affiliation, were also invested in past-life narratives, particular those in the *jātaka* genre. *Jātaka*s are, typically, past-life stories of the bodhisattva who would become Śākyamuni Buddha. They are often morality tales, and they consist of episodes from the buddha-to-be's previous lives—as animals, ghosts, hell beings, gods, and humans—in which he or she learns a moral or demonstrates one to someone else. They are some of Buddhism's oldest stories and can be found throughout the Buddhist world and beyond, where they are embedded in other texts, exist as individual works, or have been collated. Their diffusion and diversity have seen them perform diverse functions in various cultures, but the Tibetans' adaptation of them is, in many ways, singular.

Many of the most famous *jātaka*s and the related genre of *avādana*s (noble-deed stories) were first translated into Tibetan during the imperial period. One of the most famous anthologies of *jātaka*s, Āryaśūra's *A Rosary of Birth Stories,* was also translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan during this time. Most of these works were then retranslated during the later diffusion, and in the early thirteenth century, Sakya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) encouraged the translation of Kṣemendra's (d. 1070) famous Sanskrit collection of *jātaka* tales, *The Wish-Fulfilling Vine: The Noble Deeds of the Bodhisattva. A Rosary of Birth Stories, The Wish-Fulfilling Vine*, and seven other *jātaka*s were then included in the commentary section of the Tibetan Buddhist canon.[54]

Among the various Tibetan lineages, the *jātaka*s played a special role in the new-tantra Kadam tradition, for whom it became one of their "six basic texts."[55] Continuing the Dakpo Kayü tradition of combining Kadam and Kagyü practices, Rangjung Dorjé became a keen promoter of the *jātaka*s. He even composed one of the most well-known and reproduced collections of the Buddha's *jātaka*s in premodern Tibet, *Birth Stories of the Teacher*. This work includes the thirty-four *jātaka*s from *A Rosary of Birth Stories* and sixty-six from other sources.[56] Even during Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime, the collection was influential. It inspired, for example, two series of murals. The emperor Toghon Temür commissioned the first set for his palace in Dadu,[57] and the second series was completed not long after Rangjung Dorjé's death at Zhalu Monastery, near Zhigatse in Tibet. This second set is extant, along with accompanying quotations from Rangjung Dorjé's composition.[58] The text of his *jātaka* compilation also stayed in print down through the centuries; wood-block carvings of it were produced at Lhasa's Zhöl publishing house and elsewhere, and printed texts of the work have been preserved in libraries across the Plateau.[59]

Rangjung Dorjé and his lineage were not only involved in the process by which the Buddha's *jātaka*s were promoted in Tibet, however; they were also involved in a uniquely Tibetan change in its format. Other cultures had produced *avādana*s in which the Buddha was not the main protagonist, and they had produced *jātaka*s in which the Buddha-to-be played a supporting role. But only the Tibetans switched the *jātaka*s' protagonist from the Buddha to their own cultural heroes. According to Matthew Kapstein, who has traced this literary development, "There can be little doubt that the emergence of this type of narrative contributed to the ideological background for the development of an incarnate hierarchy in Tibet from the late thirteenth century onward."[60]

Some of the earliest examples of the protagonist switch can be found in the Kadam tradition and amongst the Kagyü students of the Kadam-trained Gampopa. Matthew Kapstein and Leonard van der Kuijp have both written about

a text, *The Birth Stories of Dromtön Gyelwa Jungné*, which describes the past lives of Atiśa's student and the Kadam's founder in Tibet, Dromtön Gyelwa Jungné (1004–1064). There is some question about the dating of this text, and the section in it on Dromtön's past life may be a later inclusion, but it at least speaks to the importance of the *jātaka* and past-life narratives among the Kadam tradition.[61] Another difficult-to-date past-life narrative is the story that suggests Gampopa lived a previous life as Candraprabha Kumāra, the Buddha's interlocutor in the *King of Samādhi Sūtra*.[62] This story is retold in most of Gampopa's later biographies, including Rangjung Dorjé's version,[63] but it is not in his autobiographical fragments or early biographies.

There are, however, a substantial number of datable, narrated past-life memories that are attributed to Gampopa's circle. One is the collection of five birth stories written by his student, and Düsum Khyenpa's contemporary, Pakmodrupa Dorjé Gyelpo (1110–1170).[64] This collection of five stories is not only fun—in one of them he is friends with a monkey king—it also takes another step toward the integration of liberation stories and *jātaka* collections by including connections between its five tales. Traditional *jātaka* collections, by contrast, only connect the Buddha's past life with his present life as the Buddha.

Pakmodrupa's stories make an interesting juxtaposition, furthermore, with the past-life tales of Düsum Khyenpa that are recorded in his biographies. Most striking is the fact that both men were given the title "Düsum Khyenpa" ("knower of the three times") in the title of these collated life tales.[65] The only difference is that Pakmodrupa was given two names: Düsum Khyenpa Pakmodru, while Düsum Khyenpa was only known by one name. Both sets of stories also have much more resemblance to Indian *jātaka*s than to past-life narratives constructed at later dates. They are not copies of any specific *jātaka*'s narrative or protagonists, but they do evoke variants of the *jātaka*s' settings. Both collections also claim to be memories of past lives that were developed as a result of Buddhist practice, and Pakmodrupa's writing, therefore, provides context for Düsum Khyenpa's claims to remember past lives; their existence suggests that remembering past lives was a thing to do in their community.

The works in which both sets of memories are recorded are both explicitly called *jātaka* collections, even though they include some biographical details from both yogis' lives.[66] One difference between the two, however, is that the work recalling Pakmodrupa's past lives is attributed to him, while what purports to be the earliest extant Düsum Khyenpa biography is attributed to a renowned scholar, Ga Lotsāwa Zhönnu Pel (twelfth century).

Ga Lotsāwa, who was a teacher of Düsum Khyenpa, Pakmodrupa, and Lama Zhang (1123–1193), is credited with translating eight works in the Tibetan

Buddhist canon. According to the fifteenth-century *Blue Annals*, he knew Sanskrit and studied at Nālandā Monastery in India for several years.[67] The biography of Düsum Khyenpa that is attributed to him is called *Eighteen Chapters [from the] Golden Isle: The Precious Birth Stories of the Dharma Noble Düsum Khyenpa*.[68] More analysis on the origins and content of this text needs to be completed to ascertain its dates and confirm its attribution to Ga Lotsāwa, but if he did write this work, it was an influential achievement. As well as blending the liberation story and *jātaka* genres, it demonstrates a broad knowledge of cosmology and history. And in a reflection of its protagonist's name, it is also organized into chapters on his past, present, and future lives and emanations.[69]

After Düsum Khyenpa's and Pakmodrupa's time, the Kagyü produced fewer collections of adapted *jātaka*s. Instead, they begin to incorporate tales of past lives into their lineage prayers and biographies in a more integrated way. Karma Pakshi, for example, included scattered narratives of his past-life escapades throughout his autobiographical writing. He claimed to have been a king at the time of the Buddha, a general "who effortlessly stopped the Mongol hordes," a student of Nāgārjuna, a disciple of Maitrīpā, a student of Padmasambhava's student Nup Sanggyé (ninth century), an unnamed student of Marpa, and an unnamed student of Réchungpa Dorjé Drak (1085–1161), before he was born as Düsum Khyenpa.[70] The insertion of past-life memories into his autobiographies reproduced the hybrid nature of Ga Lotsāwa's birth story and biography of Düsum Khyenpa but without the coherence or detail. None of his past-life memories match any of Düsum Khyenpa's memories, for example, and the only place they are listed diachronically is at the end of the biography of him that Rangjung Dorjé produced. Karma Pakshi contributed much material wealth, renown, and community and political support to the Karmapa lineage, and the life he lived added more than his fair share of anecdotes to the Karmapa narrative. But his contribution to the tradition's storytelling tradition was more limited. Düsum Khyenpa—or more precisely Ga Lotsāwa's biography of Düsum Khyenpa—provided a much clearer precedent for Rangjung Dorjé's biographical project.

THE AFTERLIFE OF TEXTS

This organization of reincarnation narratives is a hallmark of Rangjung Dorjé's approach to biography; his life writing was highly organized and—as we will examine now— multipronged. His stories of past live reinforce his life narrative, and both are influenced by his composition of other birth and liberation-story texts.

The *Collected Works of Rangjung Dorjé* includes the following compositions in these genres:

(1) *Birth Stories of the Teacher*,
(2) a large collection of Milarépa's songs and biographical stories,
(3) short biographies of all his non-Karmapa, Kagyü forebears,
(4 and 5) extended biographies of Düsum Khyenpa and Karma Pakshi,
(6) *Liberation Story of Rangjung Dorjé's Past Lives,*
(7) *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*, and
(8) *Liberation Story [of Rangjung Dorjé] in Verse*.[71]

Despite being attributed to Rangjung Dorjé, all the biographies in this list are based on other, previously composed biographies. The biography of Düsum Khyenpa, for example, is a condensed version of the work attributed to Ga Lotsāwa. Many of these biographies are included in—or heavily extracted from—a collection of liberation stories collated by the second Zhamapa, Khachö Wangpo (1350–1405), fifty years after Rangjung Dorjé's death. Much more work needs to be done to ascertain the authorship of this series. It may be that the stories were composed by Khachö Wangpo and later attributed to Rangjung Dorjé or the other way around. Some of these works, and particularly Düsum Khyenpa's hybrid biography-birth stories were probably composed earlier and merely edited by one or both of the third Karmapa or second Zhamapa.

The attribution of Rangjung Dorje's birth stories and autobiography is more straightforward. They are all written in the first person and include colophons stating the date and time of their composition. The only slightly peculiar thing about these three compositions is that Rangjung Dorjé does not call them autobiographies (or more precisely, "one's own liberation story"; *rang gi rnam thar,* or *rang rnam* for short). As Carl Yamamoto—who noted the same phenomenon in the literary tradition of Düsum Khyenpa's friend Lama Zhang—explained, "This does not mean that no one noticed the difference, only that the difference did not seem significant enough to create a separate category of work."[72]

Rangjung Dorjé's autobiographies did not stay in print, as it were, after his lifetime. Despite his substantial efforts in the genres of autobiography and past-life stories, his compositions were preserved but not widely disseminated between the fourteenth and twenty-first centuries. The liberation-plus-birth-story model he synthesized and polished helped to establish the Karmapa tradition's narrative identity, but as stories of new Karmapas accumulated and their reincarnation claims went uncontested, there was less interest in the multiplicity of the early Karmapas' narratives. Rangjung Dorje's narrative of the early Karmapas was

preserved, but it was presented within these other works in a condensed version. Later Karmapas were given especially powerful editorial powers over these texts; who would argue with their assessment of their predecessors' literary intentions?

After several centuries, a tradition developed of appending the list of the Karmapas' past lives to the beginning of their collective story,[73] a note of interest rather than a matter of advocacy. It was a clear literary sign that their narrative had been naturalized and the invention of this tradition forgotten. Many of the later texts that included lists of the Karmapas' early lives were written in a new genre called "golden rosaries."[74] In the centuries following Rangjung Dorjé's death, the designation "golden rosary" became a widely used term to describe the sequential liberation stories of lineage holders. These works replicated not only the content of earlier texts but also their habit of appropriating large swaths from earlier texts. Golden-rosary texts can be extensive or so condensed that they resemble lineage prayers; indeed, the line between the two genres of lineage prayers and golden rosaries is anything but clear, either historically or structurally. It is highly likely that the first people to string a line of biographies together to create a golden rosary were imitating a lineage prayer.

Lineage prayers existed before Rangjung Dorjé began to write his multi-life biographies, and they were clearly influential in his creation of a biographical series. As a liturgical manifestation of the guru-student relationship, they played a particularly central role in Kagyü literature, ritual, and practice from very early in the lineage's history. Most Kagyü lineage prayers begin with a prayer to Buddha Vajradhara, then Tilopa, Nāropā, Marpa, Milarépa, and so forth. Even if they do not provide much biographical detail, these prayers at least locate the lineage holders geographically and list them chronologically. Expansions to lineage prayers began early in the Kagyü tradition. The two oldest extant Kagyü texts are short biographies of Tilopa and Nāropā attributed to Gampopa. Gampopa also produced a short biography of his teacher Milarépa.[75] Rangjung Dorjé's and Khachö Wangpo's more thoroughgoing biographical projects were extensions of this tradition.

The various redactions of lineage texts—whether prayers or golden rosaries—also reflect the different stages of the reincarnation tradition's development quite clearly. The earliest versions of the lineage prayers do not include reincarnation lineages, but some do contain examples of their conceptual precedents. As José Cabezón noted in a 2017 journal article, Pakmodrupa's student Nyakséwa (1141–1201)[76] even used a lineage prayer to map out his own previous lives, claiming to have been a student of all his lineal predecessors. He describes himself as a student of Tilopa called Shérap Drakpa, a student of Nāropā called "the translator Dromtön," a student of Marpa called Ngoktön Chödo, Milarépa's student Réchungpa, and Gampopa's student Saltön Gomzha.[77]

This close connection to religious lineage prayers meant that most of the golden-rosary texts were not written about an individual reincarnation lineage but rather about larger transmission lineages that braid together several body rosaries. After Gampopa, the Dakpo Kagyü lineage split into many interconnected sub-branches, each following one of his primary students. Most of these lineage sub-branches are outlined in golden-rosary texts that include the biographies of their lineage holders and associated reincarnation lineages. The Karmapas are at the center of what became the Karma-Kagyü lineage. It consists of the Karma lineage and several other, supporting reincarnation lineages. The members of these secondary lineages serve as the teachers and regents in the interregnum between adult Karmapas.

Against the disruptions in order caused by births and deaths, the Karma Kagyü golden rosaries offer a story of continuity, in which both the Karmapas and members of their supporting lineages pass through similar milestones: birth, recognition, enthronement, education, vow taking, teaching, visions, and death. In the main, the biographies they contain are polished, almost liturgical. Their brevity allows for the excision of all that may complicate the lineage's story. But the later tradition did produce some lineage histories that grappled with their own complexity in more detail. The most well-known of these is a work by Situ Paṇchen (1700–1774), *Rosary of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons*.[78] It collates many of the sources that were available to its author without much commentary, leaving the narrative tensions between different layers of the reincarnation tradition's development unresolved. Its title suggests a link with the golden-rosary genre but also, in its evocation of reflecting moons rather than gold beads, a slight distance from it.

In some ways, *Crystal Moons* has more in common with the two other genres in which Rangjung Dorjé's story was also retold: dharma histories and annals. These two historical genres draw on precedents established by the imperial-era *Old Tibetan Chronicle*.[79] The *Chronicle* consists of a combination of narratives about the reigns of Tibetan kings, up to and including Tri Song Détsen, and the songs the kings, their ministers, and some commoners sang. It was collated after Tri Song Détsen's death, reconstituted in the centuries afterward, and elements of it were reproduced much later in several Tibetan historical texts, including Tséwang Gyel's (fifteenth century) *Lhorong Dharma History* and Tsuklak Trengwa's (1504–1566) *Feast for Scholars*.

While most works in these genres contain only brief biographies of the Karmapas, *Feast for Scholars* is an exception. Tsuklak Trengwa was a student of the eighth and teacher of the ninth Karmapas, and his biographies of the early Karmapas are quite extensive and include many of the same sources to which Situ

Paṇchen had access. Unlike Situ Paṇchen, however, and perhaps in a reflection of his times, Tsuklak Trengwa makes some effort to integrate the various narratives he incorporates into his biographies and to align them with developments in the lineage. As discussed later (in part II), he is not always successful at this.

The works in these two genres mark a particular moment in the complex relationship between collective memories, recorded histories, and the practice of forgetting in Tibetan history. They mark the point where the personal histories of a lineage of reincarnates or practitioners were aggregated into Tibet's communal histories. The stories they include are the stories that were remembered; other stories, stories about people who did not uphold religious lineages or those whose religious lineages ceased to be, were, in the main, forgotten.

To find one's place in a lineage narrative was to find one's place in history, so it behooved the members of any particular lineage to tell their own stories. Until Rangjung Dorje's time, the most important of these lineage histories were, like the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, more focused on familial than religious lineages, and reincarnates were hardly mentioned. A case in point is the outline of lineages provided by Tselpa Künga Dorjé (1309–1364), Rangjung Dorjé's religious student and political superior, in his historical work *The Red Annals*. A local governor appointed by the Mongol court and head of Tselpa Monastery, Künga Dorjé dedicates a good deal of his text to Indian, Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan royal lineages; he follows this with narratives of the religious lineages that were associated with powerful, aristocratic Tibetan families. The story of his own Gar family is given prominence among this collection, and he is particularly dismissive of the rival Lang family, whose scion Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen (1302–1364) had deposed him.[80]

Pointedly, the earliest versions of *The Red Annals* do not mention the Karmapas; their lineage was not important enough to be included alongside the most powerful Tibetan families and royalty of their time. But as Tibetan society and politics slowly reorganized around reincarnation lineages over centuries, at least one later edition of the *Red Annals* found space for the Karmapas' biographies.[81] By this stage, reincarnate lineages had become significantly more powerful than many familial lineages. The Karmapas' narratives had helped shape a tradition, and this tradition had, in turn, reshaped Tibetans' understanding of their history.

NOTES

1. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 124.1–3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 204.1–4.

2. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself As Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 140–168. Jens Brockmeier also talks about the cultural context of memory: *Beyond*

the Archive: Memory, Narrative, and the Autobiographical Process (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

3. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 362–377.

4. There are several configurations of the Bka' brgyud in Tibet. The broadest category includes a separate lineage, the Shangs pa Bka' brgyud, which was founded by Khyung po rnal 'byor (twelfth century) after he traveled to India and met the *mahāsiddhā* Niguma.

5. Tib. *sgrub chen*. Ronald Davidson has called into question Mar pa's direct relationship with Nāropā and suggested that the Tibetan only studied with Nāropā's student Maitrīpā: *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 143–145.

6. Matthew Kapstein, "An Inexhaustible Treasury of Verse: The Literary Legacy of the Mahāsiddhas," in *Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas*, ed. Rob Linrothe (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2006), 27.

7. The names of these three terms in Tibetan are *sa'i phyag chen, lam gi phyag chen,* and *'bras bu'i phyag chen*. Volume *a* of *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum* is dedicated to *mahāmudrā*. It contains forty-one texts of various lengths. Dwag po bkra bshis rnam rgyal provides a traditional description of *mahāmudrā* in *Phyag rgya chen po zla ba'i 'od gsal* (Varanasi: Vajra Vidya Institute Library, 2005), 247–300. Contemporary studies of *mahāmdurā* can be found in Roger Jackson and Matthew Kapstein, ed., *Mahāmudrā and the Bka' brgyud Tradition* (Andiast, Switzerland: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies), 2011. The Sa skya and Dge lugs traditions have alternate presentations of *mahāmudrā*. The Sa skya confines the idea of *mahāmudrā* to the fourth level of tantra *mudrā*. See David Jackson, "Sa-skya Paṇḍita the Polemicist: Ancient Debates and Modern Interpretations," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1990): 17–116. The Dge lugs presentation aligns *mahāmudrā* with Tsong kha pa's presentation of Madhyamaka. See Dalai Lama and Alexander Berzin, *The Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 1997).

8. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 12.2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 193.5–6.

9. See Andrew Quintman, *The Yogin and the Madman: Reading the Biographical Corpus of Tibet's Great Saint Milarépa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

10. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 33.6–7; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'gur*, 210.6.

11. To distinguish Sgam po pa's lineage from lay Bka rgyud traditions, the lineage that descended from Sgam po pa is often called the Dwags po bka rgyud.

12. Naomi Appleton discusses the relationship between realization and past-life memories in *Narrating Karma and Rebirth: Buddhist and Jain Multi-Life Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 157–190.

13. Lopez discusses the narrative purpose and symbolism of Buddha's past abode memories: "Memories of the Buddha," 21–45.

14. This term is used as a synonym for a buddha and describes the buddha's "omniscience." A similar term, "knower of all appearances" (Skt. *sarvākāra-jnāna*; Tib. *rnam pa thams cad mkhyen pa*), is used more often in *prajnāpāramitā* (*pha rol tu phyin pa*) literature.

15. Many of Dus gsum mkhyen pa's biographies were collated in Jamgon Kongtrul Labrang, *Dpal ldan dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhal gdams gces btul* (*Advice for Cherished Students*) (Kalimpong, India: Karmapa 900, 2010). They include (1) Bde chung ba, *Rje 'gro mgon rin po che'i rnam thar skyes rabs dang cas pa rin chen 'phreng ba 'bring po* (*A Middling, Precious Rosary of the Noble Rinpoche Protector's Liberation and Birth Stories*), 11–32; (2) *Rgwa Lo tsā ba. Chos rje Dus gsum khyen pa'i skyes rabs rin po che ser gling le'u bco brgyad pa* (*Eighteen Chapters [from the] Golden Isle: The Precious Birth Stories of the Dharma Noble Düsum Khyenpa*), 33–72; (3) Gzhon nu byang

chub, *Rnam thar re'u mig brga rtsa brgyad pa* (*Liberation Story in One Hundred and Eight Verses*), 81–114; and *Rje dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhal chems* (*Testament of Düsum Khyenpa*), 115–121. This collection was produced for Dus gsum mkhyen pa's nine-hundred-year anniversary.

16. His birthplace of Sa stod dkyil le tsag is only named in later biographies. The early tradition says he was born in 'Bri chu pa chos phyug. See Charles E. Manson, "Introduction to the Life of Karma Pakshi (1204/6–1283)," *Bulletin of Tibetology* 45, no. 1 (2009): 28.

17. The later tradition has provided several stories about how this name came to be. One, told in Brown, is that Dus gsum mkhyen pa was given the name "Karmapa" by the Kashmiri scholar Śākyaśrībhadra (1127–1225) because he was an emanation of the Buddha's activities: *The Dance of 17 Lives*, 23. Dus gsum mkhyen pa died in 1193 and Śākyaśrībhadra arrived in Tibet in 1204, the year Karma Pakshi was born.

18. Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 37–38.

19. Hugh Richardson nominated an area near Dar rtse mdo (Kangding) as the most likely place for this meeting: "The Karma-Pa Sect: A Historical Note," in *High Peaks, Pure Earth: Collected Writings on Tibetan History and Culture*, ed. Micheal Aris (London: Serindia, 1998), 340.

20. Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 38.

21. Michelle Sorenson, "The Second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi," *Treasury of Lives,* April 2011, http://www.treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Second-Karmapa-Karma-Pakshi/2776.

22. Karma Pak shi, *Grub chen karma pak shi'i bka' 'bum* (Gangtok, India: Gonpo Tseten, 1978), 102; Charles Manson, "Warrior Emperor and Ecclesiastic Thaumaturge: Relagions between Mongke Qan and Karma Pakshi" (paper presented at the New Directions in the Study of the Mongol Empire Conference, Jerusalem University, June 2014), 6–7.

23. Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, "Bayši" and Bayši-s in Tibetan Historical, Biographical ,and Lexicographical Texts," *Central Asiatic Journal* 39, no. 2 (1995): 296.

24. (Dpa' bo) Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Chos 'byung mkas pa'i dga' ston* (Varanasi: Vajra Vidya, 2003), 915; and 'Gos Lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*, ed. Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture 1974), 37a.

25. Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 40.

26. Skt. *pudgala-nairātmya*; Tib. *gang sag gi bdag med*. William Pietz discusses self and selflessness in "Person," in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 188–210, As does Matthew Kapstein in *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought*. (Boston: Wisdom, 2001), 29–179. Janet Gyatso analyzes the relationship between no-self and autobiography in *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001), 211–242.

27. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 89.1–7; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'gur*, 255.2–6.

28. Paul Ricoeur talks about the boundaries between mythical and calendrical history, *Time and Narrative,* vol. 3, trans. David Pellauer and Kathleen Blame (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 105–109.

29. Kevin Schilbrack, *Thinking through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2003), 199.

30. Dieter Schuh assesses Rang byung rdo rje's calendars and the calculations they required in *Erlasse und Sendschreiben mongolischer Herrscher für tibetische Geistliche* (Bonn: Wissenscha ftsverlag, 1977).

31. This physiology will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

32. Vesna A. Wallace, *The Inner Kālacakratantra: A Buddhist Tantric View of the Individual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 96.

33. Rang byung rdo rje studied Vasabhandu's *Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma* (Skt. *Abhidharmakośabhāsya*; Tib. *Chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi bshad pa*) and Asaṅga's *Compendium of Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*; Tib. *Chos mngon pa kun las btus pa*) at Gsang phu ne'u thog Monastery: *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 388.

34. Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*, 7–25.

35. John Newman translated a text on this devolution, "Eschatology in the *Wheel of Time Tantra*," in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 202–207.

36. These descriptors can be found throughout Rang byung rdo rje's songs and stories. He refers to himself as the "end-of-time yogi" (*dus mtha' rnal 'byor*) more than ten times in his songs, and he calls his era "a dark age" (*snyigs ma'i dus*) more than sixteen times. He also uses both these terms several times in his autobiographies.

37. The word *genre* has resonances with the Tibetan term *rigs*, which can be roughly translated as "type." But this suggests a categorical and, therefore, one-dimensional understanding of genre, which does not reflect its dynamic role in literary history. José Cabezón and Roger Jackson suggest some resonances between the words *genre* and *rigs*, along with other Tibetan words including *sde* ("class") or *rnam pa* ("aspect"), in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1996), 21.

38. This presentation of genre is mainly taken from Frow's work *Genre: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2006). But it is also informed by the analysis of Tibetan genres in the work of Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 116–122, and Karl Yamamoto, *Vision and Violence: Lama Zhang and the Politics of Charisma in Twelfth-Century Tibet* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 139–173.

39. Frow, *Genre*, 70. This term "horizon of expectation" was adapted from Hans-Robert Jauss's writing on reception theory, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

40. The Dunhuang manuscripts are a collection of thousands of texts found in the early years of the twentieth century in a cave near Dunhuang, a town in the deserts of present-day Gansu Province in China, at the site of a millennia-old Silk Road settlement. The Tibetans ruled the area for about seventy years in the eighth and ninth centuries, and the Tibetan manuscripts found in this area have been dated from the seventh to the eleventh centuries.

41. Imaeda, "*History of the Cycle of Birth and Death,*" 105–182. A discussion of the manuscript's date is on page 171–172.

42. The first story is discussed in Sam van Schaik and Lewis Doney, "The Prayer, the Priest and the Tsenpo: An Early Buddhist Narrative from Dunhuang," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 30, nos. 1–2 (2007): 175–217. Sam van Schaik discusses the second two texts in "The First Tibetan Buddhist Biographies?" *Early Tibet* (blog), January 11, 2012, https://earlytibet.com/2012/01/11/tibetan-buddhist-biographies. Marcelle Lalou describes the third narrative, in "Document tibétain sur l'expansion du dhyāna chinois," *Journale asiatique* 231 (1939): 505–523.

43. *Vi* is an intensifier and *mokṣa* is a derivative of the root √*muc*, which is roughly equivalent to the English word *release*.

44. Sam van Schaik, *Tibet: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 41–61; and Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetans* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2006), 80–126.

45. Matthew Kapstein, "The Indian Literary Identity in Tibet," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 774–776.

46. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 144.7–145.1–2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 368.6–369.2.

47. This pattern is noted in many other works. James Robinson notes it in his study of the *mahasiddhas*' life stories, "The Lives of Indian Buddhist Saints: Biography, Hagiography, and Myth," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, 58–61. Quintman notes developments in its outline in his study of Mi la ras pa's life, *The Yogin and the Madman: Reading the Biographical Corpus of Tibet's Great Saint Milarepa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).Yamamoto outlines it in his study of Lama Zhang's story, *Vision and Violence*, 46–78. And Manson describes the same progression in his "Introduction to the Life of Karma Pakshi," 27.

48. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 211–217.

49. Several people have written about this story and its development, including Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born*; Jacob Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet: A Study of IOL Tib J 644 and Pelliot tibétain 307," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 4 (2004): 759–772; and Lewis Doney, *The Zangs gling ma: The First Padmasambhava Biography. Two Exemplars of the Earliest Attested Recension* (Andiast, Switzerland: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2015).

50. Gyatso gives an overview of the development of the treasure literature in "The *Gter ma* Literature," in *Tibetan Literature*, 147–169. Other studies on this tradition's development and its multifaceted relationship to Tibetan imperial history and the reincarnation tradition include Doney, *The Zangs gling ma*; Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born*; and Valentine, "Lords of the Northern Treasures."

51. Karma Pakshi studied at the Rnying ma KaH thog Monastery; it was associated with the *bka' ma* or "spoken word" tradition as opposed to the *gter ma* tradition.

52. Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong chos 'byung* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1994), 240; Si tu Pan chen chos kyi byung gnas and 'Be lo tshe dban kun khyab, *Bka' brgyud gser 'phreng rnam thar zla ba chu shel gyi 'phreng ba*, 2 vols. (Varanasi: Vajra Vidya, 2004), 372. David Jackson demonstrated that the section on the early Karmapas within the latter work was written by Situ Paṇchen alone: *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2009), 447. I will, therefore, cite Situ Paṇchen alone in following citations for this work.

53. Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong chos 'byung*, 240; *Sngar pa'i skye bor rnam thar,* in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. *nga*, 356; *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 23–24; and in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 203–204.

54. Sanskrit and English versions of Āryaśūra's *Jātakamālā* (*Skyes rab gi phreng ba*) are included within Āryaśūra, *Garland of the Buddha's Past Lives*, 2 vols., trans. Justin Meiland (New York: New York University Press, 2009). A Tibetan language version of Kṣemendra's *Bodhisattvādānakalpalatā* (*The Wish-Fulfilling Vine*) is included within Dge 'dun rab gsal, *Byang chub sems dpa'i rtogs pa brjod pa dpag bsam 'khri shing la dpyad pa'i gtam rtog pa'i ri mo* (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1999). Marek Mejor completed a study of a bilingual Tibetan-Sanskrit edition of the same text, produced by the fifth Dalai Lama, *Ksemendra's Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā: Studies and Materials* (Studia Philologica Buddhica Monograph Series 8, Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1992). Nancy Grace Lin describes the introduction of these texts into Tibet: "Adapting the Buddha's Biographies: A Cultural History of the Wish-Fulfilling Vine in Tibet, Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries" (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley), 1–18.

55. Tib. Bka' gdams gzhung drug. These six texts are (1) the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Tib. *Byang chub sems dpa'i sa*) section of Asaṅga's *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (Tib. *Rnal 'byor spyod pa'i sa'i bstan bcos*); (2) Maitreya-nātha/Asaṅga's *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra-kārikā* (Tib. *Theg pa chen po'i mdo sde rgyan gyi gral ba*); (3) Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (Tib. *Bslab pa kun las btus pa'i mngon par*

rtogs pa); (4) Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*Byang chub sems pa'i spyod la 'jug pa*); (5) Āryaśūra's *Jātakamāla*, and (6) the collected sayings of the Buddha called the *Udānavarga* (Tib. *Ched du brjod pa'i tshoms*). These are described in Amy Sims Miller, "Jeweled Dialogues: The Role of 'The Book' in the Formation of the Kadam Tradition within Tibet" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2004), 17–19.

56. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. *kha, Ston pa'i skyes rabs*, 1–666.

57. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 411.

58. I thank Sarah Richardson from the University of Toronto for this information. See chap. 8, note 83, for more details.

59. Ngawang Gelek Demo lists the work in Zhöl's block prints, *Three Dkar Chags* (New Delhi: Ngawang Gelek Demo, 1970), 181. A 422-folio woodblock print, produced in Mang yul, is listed in Elena de Rossi Filibeck, *Catalogue of the Tucci Tibetan Fund in the Library of ISIAO*, 2 vols. (Naples: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1994–2003), volume 2, 333..

60. Kapstein, "The Indian Literary Identity in Tibet," 774.

61. *'Brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas kyi skyes rabs Bka' gdams bu chos*. Xining, Qinghai: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1994. Matthew Kapstein used this text as an example of the Tibetan's adaptation of the *jātaka*: "The Indian Literary Identity in Tibet," 774–776. He writes that it was "probably redacted in the thirteenth century, though certainly on the basis of materials first composed and compiled during the eleventh and twelfth centuries," 775. Van der Kuijp disagrees: "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," 24. He says the eleventh- and twelfth-century sections of the text are those that do not include 'Brom ston's past-life stories, and they were added in the mid-thirteenth century.

62. Trungram Gyatrul Rinpoche Sherpa, "Gampopa, the Monk and the Yogi: His Life and Teachings" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2004), 23. *Samādhi* is a technical term that refers to the state of intense concentration developed in meditation.

63. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. *nga*, 156.

64. Rdo rje rgyal po, *'Gro mgon phag mo gru pa'i skyes rabs kyi skor la chos tshan lnga*, in *Rdo rje'i rgyal po gsung 'bum* (Kathmandu: Khanpo Shedrup Tenzin and Lama Thinley Namgyal, 2003), 247–280.

65. *Rdo rje'i rgyal po gsung 'bum*, 1.

66. Rdo rje rgyal po, *'Gro mgon phag mo gru pa'i skyes rabs kyi skor la chos tshan lnga*; and Rgwa Lo tsā ba, *Ser gling,* in Jamgon Kongtrul Labrang, *Dbel lden dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhal gdams gces btul*.

67. See translation by George Roerich, *The Blue Annals* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 555, 713–714, and also Alexander Gardner, "Ga Lotsāwa Zhonnu Pel," *Treasury of Lives*, March 2013, http://www.treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Ga-Lotsawa-Zhonnu-Pel/6037

68. Rgwa Lo tsā ba, *Ser gling*, 33–73.

69. A thorough study of the birth and liberation stories of Sgam po pa's circle—including Dus gsum mkhyenpa's stories—would be a fruitful source of information on Tibet's rebirth narrative. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum* contains a condensed version of Dus gsum mkhyen pa's biography in *Dus gsum mkhyen pa seng ge sgra'i rnam bar thar pa'o*, vol. *nga*, 158–220. Much of it is taken from Rgwa Lo tsā ba, *Ser gling*.

70. Charles E. Manson, "Elastic Time, Magical Memories: Multifarious Lives of Karmapas," in *Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism: Birth-Narratives, Institutional Innovation, and Embodiment of Divine Power*, ed. Derek Maher and Tsering Wangchuk (Boston: Wisdom, forthcoming).

71. In *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*: from vol. *kha,* (1) *Ston pa'i skyes rabs*, 1–666; from vol. *ga* (2) *Mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i gsung mgur mdzod nag ma zhes pa karma pa rang byung rdo rjes*

phyogs gcig tu bkod pa, 1–774; and from vol. *nga*, (3) *Tai lo pa* to *O rgyan pa*, in *Bka' brgyud gyi gser phreng* , 1–352; (4) *Dus gsum mkhyen pa seng ge sgra'i rnam bar thar pa'o*, 158–220; (5) *Bla ma rin po che'i rnam par thar pa'o: Karma pa'i rnam thar,* 256–287; (6) *Sngar pa'i skye bor rnam thar*, 354–358; (7) *Bar de'i* [sic] *rnam par thar pa*, 358–374; and (8) *Rnam thar tshigs bcad ma*, 377–414.

72. Yamamoto, *Vision and Violence*, 150. Karma pak shi's autobiography is listed as a *rang nam* in the Buddhist Research Center's catalog, but within the work it is called a *rnam thar*: Karma Pak shi, *Grub chen karma pak shi'i bka' 'bum*, 1.

73. For example, 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, section. *nya*, 37b.94; (Tshal pa) Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po* (Pe cin [Beijing], China: Mi rigs dpe skrung khang, 1981), 94–108.

74. The series of biographies within Rang byung rdo rje's *Gsung 'bum* is titled *Bka' brgyud gyi gser phreng* (*Kagyü Golden Rosary*) in the collection's catalog, but this appears to be a recently attached label. This title is not used within the works themselves: *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *ka*, 5.

75. Sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen, *Sgam po pa'i gsung 'bum* (Darjeeling: Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang, 1982), 1–22, 23–42.

76. Nyag se ba founded the monastery of Gles, or Sne, in Kham.

77. Dge bshes gle dgon thub bstan byang chub and Bkra shis tshe ring, eds., *Grub thob nyag re se bo'i skyes rabs rnam thar ma 'ongs lung bstan zhal chems nyams mgur* (Dharamsala, India: A myes rma chen, 2008), 15–16; Cabezón, "On Tulku Lineages," 15.

78. Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 345–452.

79. The text known as the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* is found on PT 1287 of the Dunhuang manuscripts in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. Brandon Dotson's study of this manuscript and its text includes a transliteration of the text and analysis: "The Victory Banquet: *The Old Tibetan Chronicle* and the Rise of Tibetan Historical Narrative." Postdoctoral thesis, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, 2013).

80. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 122–124. "Tai Situ" is a title bestowed on Tibetans by Mongol and Ming emperors.

81. See the appendix for a discussion of the early Karmapas' biographies in Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*. For ease of understanding, I will continue to use the attribution, Kun dga' rdo rje.

2

Lineages

In earlier times, to help disciples,
The Buddha taught
Inconceivable ideas in
Sūtras, tantras, and *śāstras*.[1]

Following him came
The illuminating Kagyü;
Jeweled lights netted together,
They appeared as a threaded rosary.

Following them comes a yogi
Who practices for realization precisely,
Who seeks to emulate their illustrious yogas:
I am this yogi, Rangjung Dorjé, the self-arising *vajra*.

Rangjung Dorjé,
Phukmo Hermitage, Tsurpu, 1310[2]

Lineages are a pervasive theme in Rangjung Dorjé's writing, and all types of lineage were unescapable in his society and culture. The family lineage—positioned in houses into which people came by birth, marriage, or service—played a pivotal role in the functioning of Tibetan society. Royal and aristocratic family lineages, whether Tibetan or Mongol, determined its politics. Buddhist lineages were the foundations of its monasteries, and they overlapped with the stoloniferous tantric lineages that spread out across the plateau and beyond. Lineages crossed through literature, lives, and institutions, often intersecting and imitating each other as

they performed diverse functions; they maintained traditions, provided identities, established authority, and made connections across time and space.

Lineages were also the primary means by which authority was established in Tibetan society. Family lineages gave people an identity, and a place in society. But this authorization was particularly important to religious lineages, both monastic and tantric, because they drew all their authority from their links back to the Buddha. In this environment, "self-serving invention" (*rang bzo*) was treated with suspicion. Tibetans understood any change in lineages as the degrading of a pure tradition descendant from the Buddha. This is not to say that no innovation occurred in Tibet; it is merely to say that when it did, it was often presented as the reinstatement or refurbishing of an earlier tradition.[3] Within this culture, it was, therefore, both imperative and natural for Rangjung Dorjé to provide numerous lineal precedents for the Karmapa tradition and to situate the Karmapas among other continuities.

At one level, it was not difficult to create links between the early Karmapas and other lineages because the Karmapas were already members of several lineages. Each Karmapa was a member of unconnected family lineages; they were not related and came from diverse family backgrounds and regions. They did, however, share monastic and tantric vows, and—along with the Plateau's other inhabitants—a growing connection with the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, whose realm Tibet was said to be. Avalokiteśvara's presence in Tibet was marked by interventions and a growing list of emanations that were in the process of becoming lineages. The early Karmapas did not separate the Karmapa reincarnation lineage from these already existing traditions. By merely possessing multiple lineages and then—particularly in Rangjung Dorjé's writing—tying them together conceptually, they braided the Karmapa lineage into these already existent threads; and the more lineages braided into the Karmapa rosary, the harder it was to break.

FAMILY LINEAGES

Tibet's geography, its combination of tight river valleys and large plains with little agricultural potential, precluded the development of large population settlements and encouraged smaller groups to congregate in relative isolation.[4] Most of these groups were associated with local rulers who were from the same family. Families first remembered and later recorded their patrilineal genealogies, which they described as "bone lineages" (*rus*). The most powerful of these families influenced broader Tibetan history. The annals and chronicles of this history all focus on the genealogies of powerful, land-controlling families, their allegiances, and disputes.[5]

For many twentieth-century scholars, this literary focus on the leaders of prominent families suggested a society and polity organized around clans. More recent

scholarship by Jonathan Samuels, however, has modified this picture. His research has described a society based on familial loyalty and local interests rather than clans. That is to say, Tibet's inhabitants expressed loyalty to their own family and local leaders' families, but this loyalty was more often to a located household rather than to the more abstract and temporal notion of a clan.[6]

These households were embedded in webs of allegiance—through marriages, vows, loans, and their locations, for example—with other households, larger polities, and perhaps most importantly local gods and spirits. Neither these allegiances, however, nor the broader approach to allegiance and networks remained static. As Brandon Dotson has shown in his study of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*—a work that narrates the deeds of the Tibetan kings—the shifting allegiances of kings, lords, and their servants was a staple of life in imperial Tibet.[7]

The system of allegiances to the emperor broke down at the end of the Tibetan empire, but those chronicling the Mongol period in Tibet—including Rangjung Dorjé, Orgyenpa, Tselpa Künga Dorjé, and Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen—describe a new set of shifting allegiances and disputes. By this stage, the networks were not only among households but also between monasteries, and the ties that bound the inhabitants of various locations now included Buddhist lineages and the patronage of particular Mongol princes. In this context, belonging to an influential family contributed much to a person's social standing, but it did not always secure access to land and other resources. As Jangchup Gyeltsen reflects in his *Testament*, if those who were in control of land and resources did not manage it properly, not only local rulers but all those who looked to them for protection were threatened. And, as is the case for many ruling families, there could also be problems with succession: either a dearth or surfeit of male heirs would create a crisis in a family lineage.[8]

As an outsider who did not come from a powerful or even landed background, Rangjung Dorjé writes in a way that provides a distinctive perspective on the structure and influence of families in the Mongol period. The accident of his low birth and his—perhaps related—insistence that monastic vows remove people from social stratifications combine to make him something of a social critic. Unlike the genealogical histories, which tend to suggest a continuity of family lineages within either households or later monasteries, his writing highlights changing allegiances like those found in the *Chronicle*, and he describes the complex interests and identities of the people he encounters. In his social world, family is only one aspect of a person's identity and, furthermore, families tend to be "quarrelsome."[9]

Among the quarrelsome families in Rangjung Dorjé's neighborhood, the most powerful were those whose leaders had been granted the status of "lord of a thousand" (*khri dpon*) by the Mongol authorities. Although these myriarchs had to

report to the great lord (*dpon chen*) at Sakya Monastery, who in turn reported to the Mongol court, they were allowed to collect taxes in the form of labor and goods from local inhabitants. Much of this was then turned over to the Mongols, but in return they received largess from the Mongol court. In central Tibet, the province of Ü, where Tsurpu Monastery was located, the most influential families were a branch of the Gar family that headed Tsel Monastery, the Lang at Pakmodru Monastery, and the Kyura at Drigung Monastery. Sakya Monastery, located further west in Tsang, was—mostly—headed by the Khön family. Most of the myriarchs claimed descent from a great family of the imperial period. But as those who recorded the machinations of this period (like Jangchub Gyeltsen and Künga Dorje) described, this power was not corporate. Families fought among themselves for land and titles, and many members of the family lineage were forced off their lands and out of history.[10] The ruling families' genealogies do not represent a thoroughgoing presentation of bloodlines; rather, they document who within this family lineage managed to stay in power.

The narratives of these family lineages are, furthermore, complicated by the fact that the spaces over which they claimed authority were often monastic. Some of these families had founded monasteries, others had sponsored the founding of a monastery, and yet others had insinuated themselves within monastic institutions over generations.[11] The institutions they founded had become intimately linked to these families and integrated into the social networks of the spaces they inhabited, and the connections and tensions that existed outside the monasteries were just as prevalent within monastery walls.

Many of these institutions were not homogenous entities founded communally by groups of monks. They were more amorphous than this, consisting of central buildings controlled by the abbot, along with associated buildings and lands held by a variety of vested interests. Although there was usually a line demarcating monastic and nonmonastic spaces, the social and proprietorial lines between family members who continued to trade or farm and those who joined the monasteries were not as clear-cut.[12] Resources were the communal property of a household, and each person was accorded a share of these resources based on their social standing and need. This conception of shared wealth did not end when a member of the household left to join a monastery. Although wealthier families were expected to donate to the entire monastery, many families continued to provide individual sponsorship to their family members. Monks who came from wealthy families were, therefore, supported by both family and monastic patronage.

Rangjung Dorjé's writing reflects these social norms, but unlike many of his contemporaries, his writing does not focus on his family. He mentions his early relationship with his parents, but his family does not figure in his story after he

leaves to live with Orgyenpa at age five. After this, the only "family" he refers to in his autobiographies and songs are his "father gurus" and "mother sentient beings."[13] He does, however, refer indirectly to his interactions with Karma Pakshi's family, who continued to control the Karmapas' monasteries. The relationship between Karma Pakshi's family and the Karmapas' monasteries provides, therefore, a pertinent example of how family lineages occupied monastic space, and how their claims to this space interacted with the claims of other lineage holders, like monks and reincarnates.

In his autobiographical writing, Karma Pakshi claims a noble heritage for his family.[14] There is probably no way to prove or disprove this claim, but the fact that it was made speaks to a sense of family importance that is absent in Rangjung Dorjé's writing. The importance of this family's lineage is further evidenced by the control they retained over the Karmapas' monasteries after Karma Pakshi died. Karma Monastery was closer to their ancestral lands, and evidence suggests Karma Pakshi's family retained control of it for centuries. The first Tai Situ reincarnate, Chökyi Gyeltsen (1377–1448), was a member of Karma Pakshi's family, and the Tai Situ reincarnates remained the heads of Karma Monastery until Situ Panchen relocated them to Pelpung Monastery in the eighteenth century.[15]

Tsurpu Monastery was nowhere near their ancestral lands, but they gained control of it too and retained this control for nearly as long. Karma Pakshi's familial incursion into this area was tolerated but contained by local rulers. Orgyenpa notes the presence of Karma Pakshi's displaced and rough "Khampa" relatives when he visits Tsurpu.[16] The family was patronized by a local lord named Shétruk Jangtsa (better known as Dorjé Bar), who married Karma Pakshi's niece. The Shétruk family was later defeated in battle by the Gar, who took control of the whole region. The Gar family, based at Tsel Monastery, continued its support of the Karmapas, but demanded services in return.[17]

This support enabled Karma Pakshi's family to maintain control of Tsurpu throughout the Mongol imperial period and beyond. The abbots of Tsurpu were all from Karma Pakshi's family until the time of the fifth Karmapa, Dézhin Shekpa (1384–1415), who was, perhaps not coincidently, Chökyi Gyeltsen's teacher.[18] By this stage, the Karmapa reincarnation lineage had been feted by emperors from both the Yuan and Ming dynasties, amassed land and wealth, and developed a Plateau-wide reputation. And, more broadly, as Hildergard Diemberger noted, at that time familial lineages were becoming less remarked upon, as people were more likely to be "defined by place of birth and residence and/or religious affiliation."[19] These shifts in power and emphasis meant that just as it had made sense for clans to align themselves with monasteries, it now made sense for Karma Pakshi's family to align itself with the emerging reincarnation institutions.

This transition occurred centuries after Rangjung Dorjé's life, however, and toward him, Karma Pakshi's family was less accommodating. Rangjung Dorjé for his part made no claims to their monasteries despite his status as Karma Pakshi's reembodiment. He did not need to. He had other ways in. Tsurpu and Karma—if not Kampo Nénang—were not only the domains of Karma Pakshi's family, they were also religious spaces. Rangjung Dorjé gained access to them as a member of the religious lineages that they were supposed to uphold.

BUDDHIST LINEAGES: MONASTIC AND MAHĀYĀNA

Although the influence and appearance of Buddhist lineages may vary, at their core they share the same basic characteristics: they represent traditions passed down from one generation to the next, preserved by benediction, sanctified by ritual, and formalized by some form of commitment, usually the taking and keeping of vows. The oldest Buddhist lineage with which the early Karmapas were involved was the monastic lineage. This lineage had been conveyed to them through the taking of vows, which were received from preceptors who, it was understood, could trace their monastic lineage back to the Buddha.

Buddhist lineages were modeled, at least in part, on Indian familial lineages. The earliest Pali terms for monastic lineages were *kula*, which means "family," and *gotta* (Skt. *gotra*), which refers to a familial lineage and was used to imply that the Buddha's followers had the same genealogy as he.[20] During Rangjung Dorjé's time, and even today, many monks and nuns evoke this familial association by assigning themselves the Buddha Śākyamuni's family name; they are, they say, Śākya monks and nuns.[21]

It was, furthermore, the familial model that served as a basis for a group of monks to inherit a monastery from earlier members of their monastic lineage, first in India and later in Tibet.[22] As has been already noted, Tibetan monasteries were often influenced by powerful families, but in monastic spaces, familial lineages interacted with monastic lineages in complex ways. Sometimes a monk who was not a member of the region's most powerful family would be appointed abbot of a monastery due to his high standing within the community. At other times, groups of monks did found monasteries that were not associated with important family lineages or their associated polities.[23]

In Tibet, many of these unaligned monasteries were set up in remote locations. Their founders were often granted unwanted land by locals or else they colonized frontier areas, which in Tibet meant both high altitude and border regions.[24] The three monasteries that Düsum Khyenpa founded, for example, despite their later rise to prominence, were all founded as small monasteries by unaligned monks

on unclaimed land. Kampo Nénang and Karma were in isolated valleys in eastern Tibet that are still difficult to reach. Tsurpu Monastery is quite close to Lhasa and more easily accessible now, but when it was founded, its site too was hard to reach. Indeed, the monks who were left in charge of it after Düsum Khyenpa's death debated whether or not to abandon it. As an unattributed biography titled *Testament of Düsum Khyenpa* explains:

> Most of the monks had dispersed by the winter of the new year following [Düsum Khyenpa's] passing. In the spring, those who remained . . . met to discuss the situation. They agreed that Tsurpu was too difficult to maintain and hard for people to reach . . . Jara [down the Tsurpu valley from the monastery] would be more suitable for [the lineage's seat] as it was in the heart of the country and easily accessible by road.[25]

Later, instead of completely abandoning the site, they built a reliquary *stūpa* for Düsum Khyenpa's ashes and left a few monks as its caretakers. When Karma Pakshi arrived decades later, he only found the caretakers.[26]

Once established, whether they were large or small, Tibetan monasteries became the sites of varied activities. During the Mongol era, for example, all of central Tibet's administrative seats were monasteries. And as Wim van Spengen has noted, many of these large, well-endowed monasteries were positioned strategically on major trade routes.[27]

These secular activities were combined with religious undertakings that were also very varied. They included the performance of rituals for local residents, a preponderance of which—as Rangjung Dorjé's autobiographies and songs attest—were dedicated to the propitiation of spirits and the associated goal of increasing agricultural and pastoral production. They were also the site of the Tibetans' centuries-long project of first translating, then systemizing and commentating on, Indian Buddhist texts, beliefs, and lineages.

By the early Karmapas' time, most of the translation work had been completed, and the focus had switched to studying, systemizing, and commentating on inherited traditions. The first three Karmapas were all very much engaged in this process. Karma Pakshi studied at Nyingma Kaḥtok Monastery near his birthplace in eastern Tibet, which was a center of learning within the Nyingma tradition; and both Düsum Khyenpa and Rangjung Dorjé studied at the famous Sangpu Neutok in central Tibet.[28] Along with the other—sometimes rival—centers of learning at Zhalu and Sakya Monastery, the monks at Sangpu Neutok had developed many of the systems of thought (logic, epistemology, ontology, and ethics) that have since underpinned Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. Rangjung Dorjé's studies at Sangpu

Neutok shaped his commentaries and, therefore, helped to frame his lineage's developing approach to philosophy, or, as they called it, "the presentation of its view."[29]

Toward the end of his life, Rangjung Dorjé was involved in the production of a Buddhist canon, most probably in association with the *Red Annals* author and his local lord, Tselpa Künga Dorjé, who finished work on a version of the canon in 1351, over ten years after Rangjung Dorjé's death. At around the same time at Zhalu Monastery, first Jamyang (thirteenth century) and then Butön Rinchen Drup produced another version of the canon that was finished by 1335. The two versions of the "translations of the Buddha's words" (*Bka' 'gyur*) and "translations of the commentaries" (*Bstan 'gyur*) that these projects produced became, as Paul Harrison has noted, "the twin fonts from which most of the later standard editions of the [canon] appear to flow." [30]

Both the philosophical and canonization projects were acts of consolidation; they cataloged a mass of textual traditions, making them accessible to others and preserving them. By conducting this work, the monasteries presented themselves, as Peter Schwieger has explained, "as the highest guarantors of this heritage . . . [which] guaranteed the authenticity of the tradition while passing on to later generations the power of blessing that it drew from its origins."[31] They were, in other words, fulfilling the role of protector of the dharma that had previously been performed by secular rulers. Rangjung Dorjé's association with this process conferred authority on him at the time, and his interpretations and systemization of both *sūtra* and tantra traditions have remained influential. His writings on the "five texts of Maitreya" in the *sūtra* tradition—which he studied at Sangpu Neutok—and his explanation of the tantric worldview in the *Profound Inner Meaning* have been especially significant in later Tibetan intellectual history.

In the context of the present study, it is important, furthermore, to note that he was engaged in these projects of philosophical consolidation at the same time he was consolidating the reincarnation tradition and that there are links between these various projects. His commentarial response to Maitreya's five texts and the *Profound Inner Meaning*, for example, both emphasize buddha nature. According to Rangjung Dorjé and many other members of the Kagyü lineage, there is no difference between the nature of an ordinary being's mind and that of a buddha's mind; the nature of both is the *dharmakāya*, and it is equivalent to both the "realm of reality," or *dharmadhātu* (Tib. *chos nyid*), and the essence of awakening, or *tathāgartagarbha* (Tib. *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*). This awakened reality is obscured by ignorance and concepts. But if these obscurations are clarified, the awakened state will arise. When unobscured, the *dharmakāya* will, furthermore, bring forth the other two bodies of a buddha, the *saṃbhogakāya* and the

nirmāṇakāya—which is to say, intentional, beneficial emanations will arise. As Rangjung Dorjé explained, "Thoughts have no essence; they are like an illusion and a mirage. Still, from the transformation of the basis of these very [thoughts; i.e., the nature of the mind], form *kāya*s emerge that benefit all sentient beings."[32]

As well as highlighting the link between the buddha nature and manifestations in his work, Rangjung Dorjé also wrote extensively about the bodhisattva ideal and its links to manifestations. In his explanation of a work attributed to Nāgājurna called *In Praise of Dharmadhātu*, he wrote of bodhisattvas' commitment to endure indefinitely and to manifest in diverse forms.[33] *Birth Stories of the Teacher* exemplifies this ideal represented in narrative form. And in his engagement with the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, Rangjung Dorjé narrates their stories and analyzes their protagonist buddhas' and celestial bodhisattvas' ontology. These beings perform the role of what Stephan Beyer has called "abiding and saving" deities,[34] who continue as multidimensional forces for good after their own awakening. The *sūtra*s primarily describe these deities in their *saṃbhogakāya* form, teaching highly realized disciples. But they also explain how these *saṃbhogakāya* manifest *nirmāṇakāya*—*sprul sku*—or emanation bodies that aid ordinary sentient beings.

Across Buddhist Asia in the first millennium, the bodhisattvas' purported ability to liberate devotees had led to the development of their cults, and these cults had also played a particular role in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet; they had been an important element of the imperial family's engagement with Buddhism and after the fall of the empire had become the foci of much religious practice. By the time Rangjung Dorjé encountered the Mahāyāna pantheon, some of the *sūtra* deities had been given a new lease of life by association with tantric practices, and in Tibet, Avalokiteśvara was the most influential of these crossover deities. This celestial bodhisattva, who the Mahāyāna *sūtras* claim to be an emanation of the Buddha Amitābha's compassion, had come to be particularly associated with Tibet. Rangjung Dorjé wrote about him in both as a deity of both the *sūtra*s and tantras, and as this chapter will explore shortly, his Tibetan cult was very influential in the development of the reincarnation tradition.[35]

In Rangjung Dorjé's writing, he also took sides in a debate between the Kagyü lineage and their sometimes rivals, the Sakya, that had by his time endured for nearly a century. Sakya Paṇḍita began the debate by producing a scathing attack on the Kagyü position in *Distinguishing the Three Vows*.[36] He held that it was incorrect to posit the existence of a *tathāgartagarbha* endowed with the qualities of awakening in sentient beings' minds because this would suggest the result (awakening) was present in the cause (the mind of a sentient being). He suggested instead that there were two types of buddha nature, or *tathāgartagarbha*: (1) the pervasive potential enabled by the emptiness that is present in all beings and

(2) a developing potential in the minds of those with *bodhicitta*.[37] He was also adamant that a clear distinction had to be made between the exoteric practice of the six perfections—generosity, morality, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom—that are outlined in the *sūtras* and the esoteric path of the tantras. The tantras must be preceded by proper empowerments, which could only be given to a limited number of people, and the empowered must keep their practices secret.[38]

Sakya Paṇḍita's presentation focused on the lack of a permanent self, whereas the Kagyü and Rangjung Dorjé focused on the qualities that were inherent in a mind's nature. Sakya Paṇḍita made a clear distinction between the realm of reality, the *dharmadhātu*, and the developing *tathāgartagarbha*; the Kagyü aligned them.[39] The differences between Sakya Paṇḍita's ideas and Rangjung Dorjé's presentation—which followed the basic Kagyü approach to the nature of mind—may seem slight, but they suggest a difference in the relationship between persons and reality that had real-world consequences.

This distinction suggests a different socialization of religious practices. Through the associations with different monasteries, monks developed a sense of identity and networks of contacts. Even though they traveled to other monasteries to study philosophy and take tantric empowerments, they usually associated themselves with one monastery and its tradition above all others. Many lineages may have intersected within this monastery's walls, but the monasteries usually focused on the practices of a particular lineage and aligned themselves with broader schools of thought and practice, such as the Kagyü, the Sakya, the Kadam, the Nyingma, and so forth.

Sakya Paṇḍita's view on *tathāgartagarbha*, therefore, helped to shape the way that those who understood themselves to be followers of Sakya saw themselves and the world. It lent itself to a more hierarchical interpretation of Buddhist practice, and this was enforced by his insistence that the exoteric path was only open to a few properly empowered people who must keep it secret. This approach most probably restricted the number of people who would have, for example, claimed to remember past lives or be able to produce multiple concurrent emanations. And this, in turn, may go some way to explaining why reincarnation as an institution developed first in the Kagyü traditions and later at Sakya.

TANTRIC VISIONS

Although Sakya and Kagyü proponents disagreed on some aspects of Buddhist philosophy and practice, they agreed on at least one thing: in tantric practice, the

role of the guru is central. Practitioners should enter the Vajrayāna, "the vehicle of the *vajra*," and become a part of a tantric lineage through their guru's activation of their potential for realization in a process called "empowerment." During the empowerment ceremony, inductees were introduced to a new way of seeing themselves and the world. They were led into a visualized *maṇḍala*, with the guru in the form of a deity at its center. In the most developed tantras, they were told to visualize themselves as the central figure, and then to visualize aspects of the *maṇḍala* and its central deity within their own body. They also took vows that bound them to the empowering guru for all future lives.

Rather than the general familial lineages that had influenced the presentation of Buddhist monastic lineages, the model for the Vajrayāna lineages was royal lineages. To enter a Vajrayāna lineage was analogous to becoming a member of a royal family. According to Ronald Davidson, this shift to using royal models was part of the developing "imperial metaphor" in late-first-millennium Indian Buddhism, which saw the Vajrayāna tradition's presentations of relative truth take on much of the language and imagery of a royal court. As Davidson explains, this presentation was supposed to make these practices appealing to embattled Indian rulers, enabling them to visualize themselves as lords at the center of a *maṇḍala*, and in the process granting Indian Buddhists an important ritual role in Indian royal courts during difficult times.[40] Rather than using the familiar term *kula*, Vajrayāna lineages were called *vaṃśa*. The word *vaṃśa* was first used to describe the joints created in bamboo as it grows, but it came to refer to genealogies and particularly royal genealogies.[41]

In the end, this appeal to royalty did not work, and Buddhism was all but wiped out in India. But it did make the tradition appealing to people from neighboring, strife-filled regions like Tibet. The Tibetans adapted and promoted many different lineages, levels, and forms of these empowerments and the practices associated with them.

Indeed, the variety of tantric practices the Tibetans adopted and developed was so extensive they were eventually categorized into four main groups: action tantras, conduct tantras, yoga tantras, and highest yoga tantras.[42] And yogas associated with the tantras were divided into two further stages: the creation and completion stages. The creation stage was based on the visualization of the deity in their *sambhogakāya* form. In some practices, the deity was visualized outside the body, but in the most developed forms of tantric practice, the ones that Rangjung Dorjé wrote most about, the practitioner imagines herself as the deity. These visualizations broke down the practitioner's sense of self, blurred the line between self and other, and allow her to envision her own awakening. The completion stage practices then used yogas to hasten this transformation.

In the Kagyü lineage, the primary yogas of the completion stage were the six dharmas of Nāropā: (1) the yoga of inner heat, (2) the yoga of illusory body, (3) the yoga of clear light, (4) the yoga of dreams, (5) the yoga of the in-between state, and (6) the yoga of the transference of consciousness at the time of death.[43] These complicated practices required practitioners to understand and transform their subtle physiology. Rangjung Dorjé took a particular interest in this physiology. His most famous work, the *Profound Inner Meaning*, addressed this topic, and it was a recurring motif in his songs. Like his work on astrology and calendars, his descriptions of the subtle body were based on the Indian tantric traditions. These expositions suggest the body consists of energies, subtle winds (Skt. *prāṇa*; Tib. *rlung*), that circulated through channels (Skt. *nāḍī*; Tib. *rtsa*) and interacted with essences, which were often called *bindu* but which Rangjung Dorjé most frequently called *bodhicitta*. As chapter 1 explored, these subtle energies were said to be influenced by planetary movements. They were also said to be interdependent with the mind; the body was said to arise from the mind, and the mind was said to rest on the body's subtle winds. The practitioner who understood how the winds, channels, and essences worked together could manipulate them using yogas and, as a consequence, change her mental patterns. Eventually, the tantras claimed, the yogas broke down the bodily patterns that underpinned the cycles of birth and death. The practitioner could direct her subtle winds into her central channel, and thus bring about a realization of selflessness, interdependence, and the nature of the mind. As Rangjung Dorjé reflects in one of his songs:

> Subtle winds, channels, and essences, these vital points,
> Are unceasingly interdependent;
> Cultivating them unceasingly
> Quickly clears self-obsession's veils.[44]

The lineage's focus on these six yogas and a subtle version of the body meant Kagyü yogis spend large parts of their texts—and by suggestion their days—focusing on the interrelated transformations of bodies, speech, and mind. The yogas' purpose was to transform the ordinary body, speech, and mind into the buddha's multiple bodies, awakened speech, and unveiled *dharmakāya*. To do this, the yogas made particular use of the transformations of body, speech, and mind that occur through sleep, dreaming, and death. Sleep and dreaming were said to act as a practice run for death and the intermediate state; if a yogi could control her mind while sleeping and dreaming, she should be able to guide her consciousness through death and the intermediate state.

As Rangjung Dorjé's writing reveals, the Kagyü's perceived mastery of these death-and-transference practices made a particular contribution to the discourses of reincarnation. The practice and promotion of these practices within the Kagyü lineage created a discursive backdrop for the descriptions of the journeys between lives that were then co-opted into the reincarnation tradition's narrative. From this perspective, Rangjung Dorjé's *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*, in which he tracks his journey from his life as Karma Pakshi to his life as Rangjung Dorjé, is an exposition of the transference of consciousness at the time of death and the yoga of the in-between state.

The Kagyü focus on *mahāmudrā* also encouraged reincarnation discourses. According to Rangjung Dorjé, an understanding of *mahāmudrā* is essential to the correct practice of the yogas. Those who practice these yogas without understanding *mahāmudrā* are "marmots doing exercises."[45] But the yogas are not essential to an understanding of *mahāmudrā*. It is technically possible to realize *mahāmudrā* without practicing yogas; it is just highly unlikely. One reason for this unlikeliness is the close link between *mahāmudrā* and the practice of guru devotion or guru yoga, which the practice of the other yogas underpins. To perform guru yoga, which was deemed necessary for realization, the practitioner focused on the guru as the buddha's three bodies: they understood their mind to be the truth body, or *dharmakāya*, in essence; they focused on their non-dual enjoyment body, or *sambhogakāya*, in meditation, and they payed homage to their creation body, *nirmāṇakāya* or *sprul sku*, in life.[46]

Being able to see the guru as the buddha's three bodies was not, however, the end goal. As Rangjung Dorjé said in one of his songs:

> It is as if external gurus keep you beguiled, and
> The obsession with their form causes bondage.
> Understand that the guru is your own
> Unceasing awareness.[47]

The practitioner's mind may have been inspired first by an external guru, but the goal of guru yoga was subtler than this. Its final outcome was the realization that the guru's mind and the yogi's mind were nondual. It was this realization of an ontological continuity of mind that was the essence of the Kagyü lineage; empowerments and vows were merely its cause.

The link between mind and tantric lineage was made explicit in the words their advocates used to describe them. In Indian Vajrayāna, realization flowing from person to person was called *paramparā*, which means "one to another."[48] It and the word *tantra* both imply continuity rather than links in a chain. The earliest datable

usage of *tantra* was in the *Ṛg Veda,* where it refers to a loom's weft threads. Since then, it has been used both metaphorically and literally to refer to the continuity of knowledge in a variety of contexts: either through people or in a text.[49]

In choosing words to translate these ideas, the Tibetans used two connected words. To translate *tantra*, they chose the word *rgyud* (pronounced "gyü"), which means both a thread and the uninterrupted flow from one place to another. It is the Tibetan word used to convey not only the texts and the tradition that transmits them, but the mind (*sems*) stream (*rgyud*). To translate *paramparā* they use a homonym of *rgyud, brgyud*, which also means "connection" or "through" as well as "lineage." This is the word used as the second syllable of the word *Kagyü*, "the lineage (*brgyud*) of oral instruction (*bka'*)."

These terms were not only used to represent the realization of continuity, they were also used to describe the beings who were understood to have this realization: the anthropomorphic "lineages" that were evoked in visualizations and prayers. In a synecdoche similar to the role local leaders played in Tibet's secular histories, these "holders of the lineage" came to represent both the most subtle understanding of lineage and its broader social grouping. The blurring of persons with lineages and the representation of lineages through the lining up of people was an important precedent for the establishment of reincarnation lineages, and it was much more prevalent in Vajrayāna lineages than it was in monastic lineages.

Part of the reason for this prominence was the belief, a development on guru yoga, that lineages themselves had soteriological potential; the gurus were not merely conduits for vows and benedictions, they were the embodiment of nondual insight, the awakened and clear buddha nature that their teachers embodied before them and their students would embody after them. In much the same way as the *mahāsiddhas*' liberation stories became objects of meditation, and the guru became an object of meditation, the entire lineage then came to be considered a perfect object of meditation. By first focusing on, and then realizing a lack of duality between, this object and the yogis' minds, those meditating on lineages hope to merge with them.

Among many other examples in Tibetan Buddhist literature, the practice of lineage veneration is evoked repeatedly in Rangjung Dorjé's writing. The following song to the lineage, composed on retreat in Tsari, exemplifies it. It begins with Vajradhara and then lists all his predecessors in the developing Karma Kagyü lineage. It reads:

> From the sacred site, the dharma palace, Akaniṣṭha
> In the form of innate, great bliss comes Vajradhara.
> I invoke you. Please inspire me.

When this inspiration stays in my mind, innateness, wisdom will arise.
Tilopa in Śrīnagara, the great sacred site,

You are inseparable from Vajradhara. I invoke you.
Nāropā in Pullahari, the sacred site,
You are the ascetics' yogi. I invoke you.
[Marpa,] the southern noble in leafy and green Lho, the sacred site,
You are the yogi who realized secret mantra's meaning. I invoke you.
Noble, Great Mila[répa] in the snowy mountains, the sacred site,
You are the one who knows mind and subtle winds. I invoke you.
Noble Doctor of Dakpo in glorious eastern Dakpo, the sacred site,
You are the *nirmaṇakāya* prophesied by the Buddha. I invoke you.
Noble Düsum Khyenpa at Kampo Kangri [Kampo Nénang], the sacred site,
Your nature is unlimited compassion. I invoke you.
Noble Rechen at Akaniṣṭha Karma [Monastery], the sacred site,
You are the wanderers' protector, lord of ripening and freeing. I invoke you.
Noble Puṇyavajra in the eastern land of Pungri, the sacred site,
You hold the Kagyü teachings' banner. I invoke you.
Noble Karmapa at Tölung Tsurpu, that great land.
You are the precious wanderers' guide. I invoke you.[50]

This lineage prayer demonstrates several of the specific characteristics of Vajrayāna lineages that helped enable reincarnation lineages. Perhaps the most evident of these is the slippage between personal identities that the Vajrayāna ontology—building on the Buddhist tenet of selflessness—encouraged. The process of merging is described twice in this song: first when Vajradhara arises "in the form of innate, great bliss," which is a subjective experience; and second when Vajradhara is said to be "inseparable" from Tilopa.

The purposeful breaking down of personal boundaries is aided by Vajrayāna Buddhism's nondualistic approach to mind and body, and the descriptions of Milarépa as "the one who knows both mind and subtle winds." The mastery of yoga is understood to allow yogis like Milarépa to manifest, dissolve, or transform bodies at will, an ability that blurs the separation between beings and creates for them a multi-formed identity.

The other notable element of this song is the way that Rangjung Dorjé braids the Karmapa reincarnation lineage into the Karma Kagyü's Vajrayāna lineage. The lineage passes from the "Noble Doctor of Dakpo," Gampopa, to Düsum Khyenpa, and after passing through two more lineage holders—"Noble Réchen,"

or Drogön Réchung (1148–1218), and Pomdrakpa, who is given the Indian name "Puṇyavajra"—it returns to "the Karmapa," Karma Pakshi. In this way, the lineage's multi-life narrative incorporates the Karmapas' multi-life narrative; the lineage rosary includes the Karmapa rosary.

This image of the Karmapa body rosary—which would only begin to make sense when there were three embodiments of the Karmapa—is first encountered in Rangjung Dorjé's writing. Later reiterations of the Karma Kagyü lineage continue past Rangjung Dorjé's lineage evocations, past Karma Pakshi, through Orgyenpa to Rangjung Dorjé. After Rangjung Dorjé's death, one of his most prominent students, Yungtönpa (1296–1376), held the lineage, before passing it back to the fourth Karmapa, Rölpé Dorjé, and this process of weaving Karmapas into the lineage has continued to this day.[51] The early Karmapas were granted authority by their inclusion in this lineage, and as the Karmapas' standing increased, their presence granted authority to the Karma Kagyü lineage.

AVALOKITEŚVARA'S ABODE

Within the Kagyü tradition, the associated practices of the six yogas of Nāropā, *mahāmudrā,* and guru yoga are used in combination with a variety of deity practices, which are taken from the tantras' root texts. Rangjung Dorjé wrote both practice manuals and commentaries on a number of deity practices, particularly those taken from the *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Kālacakra Tantras*. But he and the other Karmapas were to become particularly associated with another deity: Avalokiteśvara.[52]

In the Tibetan tradition, Avalokiteśvara is called "the lord of compassion," the one who continues to "abide and save" those who ask him for help. Rangjung Dorjé's *Collected Works* contain a praise to the deity, five commentaries on practices associated with him, and two manuals for granting his empowerments[53]Avalokiteśvara makes repeated visionary appearances in Rangjung Dorjé's songs and autobiographies, blessing, encouraging, and reprimanding his devotee. And Avalokiteśvara is embedded in the landscapes through which Rangjung Dorjé moves; there are statues of him and sacred sites dedicated to him. All these interactions reflect Avalokiteśvara's special status in both Rangjung Dorjé's life and the thirteenth-century Tibetan *imaginaire*; by this stage, the deity's relationship with Tibet and the Tibetan people was multiple and ubiquitous.

As Sam van Schaik's survey of Avalokiteśvara materials in the Dunhuang documents suggests, the deity had been introduced to Tibet as a member of the Mahāyāna pantheon during the imperial period. At this stage, despite its popularity in China, Avalokiteśvara's Tibetan cult was apparently limited, and members of the royal family were proponents of the Mahāyāna Buddha Vairocana.[54] But—as

evidenced by the collection of *dhāraṇi* (long mantra) texts, praises, and *sādhana* (means of accomplishment) dedicated to the deity among the post-imperial Dunhuang documents—Avalokiteśvara's popularity increased during the few centuries after the empire's collapse. What is more, he was transformed from a deity associated with the *sūtra*s to a central tantric figure.[55]

It was not, however, until the later transmission of Buddhism that Avalokiteśvara became Tibet's leading divinity, and this was the result of repeated and disparate promotional projects on his behalf. Atiśa was one of Avalokiteśvara's most influential supporters. He introduced three forms of the deity's practice to Tibet in the early eleventh century. Following this, as Leonard van der Kuijp has explained, Atiśa's students, the Kadampas, "were quick to universalize him as the patron-Bodhisattva of the entire Tibetan cultural area."[56] He was popular in western Tibet, where he was promoted by the region's ruling family and was a favorite of Atiśa's principle student, Dromtön, who was based in central Tibet. Atiśa was even said to have recognized Dromtön as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara.[57] Around the same time, a two-day fasting practice focused on a thousand-armed form of Avalokiteśvara was introduced to Tibet through Nepal. This form of practice is attributed to the mysterious and perhaps mythical Kashmiri princess Bhikṣunī Lakṣmī (Gélongma Pelmo), and it gradually became very popular in Tibetan lay communities.[58]

Almost a century later, Réchungpa, who was—with Gampopa—one of Milarépa's two preeminent students, traveled to India and brought back another form of Avalokiteśvara practice: Jinasāgara, or "Ocean of Victors." The *Blue Annals*' lineage list for this teaching begins with Padmasambhava, passes through several Indian students until Réchungpa, his students, Pomdrakpa, Karma Pakshi, Orgyenpa, and Rangjung Dorjé.[59] Rangjung Dorjé's *Liberation Story in Verse* records that Orgyenpa empowered him in this practice as a child.[60] He also wrote a song about this lineage, which describes them leading him to the Sukhāvatī pure land to meet Avalokiteśvara.[61]

Along with his knowledge of and engagement with these Kagyü and Kadampa practices, Rangjung Dorjé was profoundly influenced by the treasure tradition's recasting of Avalokiteśvara's role in Tibetan history and cosmography. This narrative was outlined in two texts, the *Pillar Testament* and the *Maṇi Kambum*. Tradition has it that Atiśa himself found the *Pillar Testament* manuscript in Lhasa's Jokhang Temple. It purported to contain the testament of Tri Songsten Gampo (ca. 605–649), the Tibetan king during whose reign Buddhist temples were first constructed in Tibet. Historical evidence suggests that Tri Songsten Gampo had a benign rather than committed approach to the practice of Buddhism in his realm. But the *Pillar Testament* recast him not only as a Buddhist but also

as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, who along with Tārā (his Chinese queen) and Bhṛkuṭī (his Nepali queen) had manifest to establish Buddhism.[62]

The *Maṇi Kambum* was even more influential. Discovered by three treasure finders between the mid-1100s and mid-1200s, it further developed Tibet's relationship with Avalokiteśvara in two primary ways. First, it included even more deity practices, such as the well-known "system of the king," which Rangjung Dorjé empowered his student Longchen Rabjampa to practice.[63] Second, and perhaps more influentially, it told a new version of Tri Songsten Gampo's story, which included a new cosmography of Tibet that established the snowy land as Avalokiteśvara's special abode.

Following the structure of many Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, the *Maṇi Kambum* begins this narrative and cosmology through a sequence of exponentially multiplying manifestations. The Buddha Amitābha, it says, empowered "the best of bodhisattvas" Avalokiteśvara "to emanate [*sprul*] many *saṃbhogakāya* pure lands, with many *saṃbhogakāya* buddhas within them . . . [and from them] *nirmāṇakāya* [*sprul sku*] pure lands, within which were many *nirmāṇakāya* buddhas" and so on for several repetitions. [64] Eventually, the last set of emanations creates "Jambudvīpas [or earths], in each of which is a Vajrāsana [Bodhgaya], to the north of which is a border region, a snowy land, in which there is a King of Horses, Balāha,[65] an eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara, a Tārā and a Bhṛkuṭī."[66]

This vision presents Avalokiteśvara not only as Tibet's abiding protector but also as its originator. It draws on precedents from the Mahāyana *sūtras*, particularly the *Karaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, which focuses on Avalokiteśvara's role as an emanation of Amitābha that guides beings to his pure land, Sukhāvatī.[67] But it adds Tibet—"to the north of [Bodhgaya] a border region, a snowy land"—into this pure-land geography. As Matthew Kasptein explains, the *Maṇi Kambum*'s description lent "a semblance of canonical authority" to the special relationship between Avalokiteśvara and Tibet.[68] And perhaps even more influentially, it naturalized it. "How could the Buddha's teaching have been artificially implanted in such a realm," Kapstein asked, "the very existence of which is evidence of the Buddha's compassionate engagement in the world?"[69] Along with this naturalization, Rangjung Dorjé's writing, and other writing from this period, suggested a further cultural and social corollary; by accepting that Tibet is Avalokiteśvara's realm, they expected the deity to manifest there, and attributed to him much of the greatness and kindness they encountered.

The idea that celestial beings can manifest both abodes and beings in those abodes was a trope in many Mahāyana *sūtras* and tantras. These abilities were described using a variety of words that were usually cognates of *nirmāṇa* (creating things) and *vikurvita* (assuming shapes). The Tibetans chose two syllables to

translate these cognates: *sprul* and *'phrul*. R. A. Stein conducted an extensive analysis of these syllables in 1973, and concluded that (1) both can be used in verbs, nouns, and adjectives; (2) *sprul* is the causative or intentional form of *'phrul*; and (3) they both indicate (being equipped with) magical powers, the supernatural, and transformation.[70]

These two syllables have a long and prestigious history in the Tibetan language. In the pre-Buddhist period, they were used to describe the supernatural power of kings and deities. Then, by using these syllables to create a whole group of neologisms, the translators of Buddhist texts made a clear link between their new schema and previous power structures. Among this group of neologisms were three words that became particularly important in the reincarnation tradition: *sprul sku, sprul ba*, and *rnam 'phrul*.

As already discussed, the word *sprul sku* (Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*) has a complicated history.[71] Despite the fact that it later became a synonym for reincarnates, none of the early Karmapas use it to describe themselves or other Karmapas. And none of the usages of this term that I have been able to check suggest the term is being used to indicate *the* reincarnation of a recently deceased, specific figure; rather, they suggest that the person being described was an actual buddha on earth. The people referred to by this designator were, in other words, as *a sprul sku* not *the sprul sku of* anyone.

Sprul sku was initially used to refer to the Buddhas' emanation bodies. But as the tantras became more prevalent, the meaning of *sprul sku* (or *nirmāṇakāya*) shifted. As *tantrika*s practiced seeing their guru inseparably from their meditational deities and the gurus' ordinary forms as the deity's ordinary form, they started to speak about their gurus as *sprul sku* or *nirmaṇakāya*. This is the sense in which Rangjung Dorjé uses the term most frequently, as a near synonym for his primary guru, Orgyenpa.

A further consequence of this was that gurus with large followings were being called *sprul sku* by a lot of people, and some of them even came to be associated with one or another of the specific buddhas that are described in Buddhist texts. Being described as a buddha in this way enabled these beings to instigate new traditions, a prerogative usually reserved for the historical or tantric buddhas.

One example of such a person is Gampopa, whom Rangjung Dorjé describes in the previously cited lineage prayer as "the *nirmaṇakāya* [or *sprul sku*] prophesied by the Buddha." This line alludes to a past life claimed for Gampopa as the bodhisattva Candraprabha Kumāra (Dawa Zhönnu), to whom the Buddha entrusted the *King of Samādhi Sūtra*. Gampopa's position as a *nirmaṇakāya,* and the Buddha's past life endorsement of him, were used by the Kagyü tradition to countenance his unorthodox reading of the *King of Samādhi Sūtra*. This reading, much criticized by

Sakya Paṇḍita, insisted that this *sūtra* taught a form of *mahāmudrā*, thus blurring the boundaries between the tantras and the *sūtras*.[72]

A similar process of authorization repeatedly occurs within the treasure tradition. Nyangrel Nyima Özer, for example, claimed to have attained the state of a buddha and produced a *nirmaṇakāya*. He did this, he says, seventeen lifetimes after living a life as Tibet's second "dharma king" Tri Song Détsen (ca. 743–ca. 800), and receiving instruction from Padmasambhava. Nyangrel uses his status as a *nirmaṇakāya* to authorize the treasure texts he finds,[73] and these texts, in turn, do much to establish Padmasambhava as a "second Buddha," who is, therefore, able to self-authorize the teachings he gives.

The two terms *sprul ba* and *rnam 'phrul* were used much more commonly, and almost interchangeably. Buddhist practitioners were sometimes said to be the emanations of deceased teachers (although as will be explained in chapter 3, it was more usual to speak of " rebirths" than emanation in these contexts). But the most common way to use the terms *sprul ba* and *rnam 'phrul* to make connections between beings was to describe a person as the emanation of a celestial bodhisattva or, more rarely, a buddha.

In the centuries leading up to Rangjung Dorjé's life, a particularly common trend in emanations was the "three-protector-bodhisattva" motif, in which three living or historical beings were aligned with the three celestial bodhisattvas: Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Vajrapāṇi. The treasure tradition created the idea of the "three dharma kings" and suggested Tri Songsten Gampo was Avalokiteśvara, Tri Song Détsen was Mañjuśrī, and their descendant Tri Tsukdétsen, also known as Relpachen (b. 806; r. 815–841), was Vajrapāṇi. Rangjung Dorjé describes a vision of these three dharma kings as "emanations" (*sprul ba*) of the three protector bodhisattvas; he also positions them in Lhasa's "naturally formed palaces" in a style reminiscent of his lineage prayers.[74]

In the Kadam tradition, three of Atiśa's main disciples—Dromtön (Avalokiteśvara); Ngok Lekpé Shérap (1059–1109; Mañjuśrī), the founder of Sangpu Neutok Monastery; and Khutön Tsöndru Yungdrung (1011–1075; Vajrapāṇi)—were associated with the three protector bodhisattvas. As were Dromtön's three main disciples: Zhönnu Gyeltsen (1031–1106) with Avalokiteśvara, Potowa Rinchen Sel (1027–1105) with Mañjuśrī, and Tsültrim Bar (1038–1103) with Vajrapāṇi.[75]

Beings were also associated with individual bodhisattvas. Chögyel Pakpa's biographer and student Yeshé Gyeltsen (thirteenth century), claimed that his teacher was an emanation of Buddha Vairocana.[76] Other members of the Sakya lineage were said to be emanations of Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom.[77] But, by far, the bodhisattva with the greatest number of claimed emanations in Tibet throughout its history has been Avalokiteśvara. Later, through his association with the Dalai

Lama series of incarnations, Avalokiteśvara would come to symbolize Tibet to many. [78] But even before this, several reincarnation lineages had been associated with Tibet's originator and patron bodhisattva, including the Karmapas.

Although the Karmapas' full apotheosis did not occur until a few centuries after Rangjung Dorjé's death, connections between the Karmapas and Avalokiteśvara had already been made in the early Karmapas' writing. Düsum Khyenpa's biographers, for example, claim that one of his concurrent emanations had achieved the state of Avalokiteśvara.[79] And in Karma Pakshi's fragmentary autobiography, he claims to be "Avalokiteśvara's manifestation, skipping over parts of the path, doing deeds for wanderers."[80]

Despite his predecessor's claims, Rangjung Dorjé's relationship with Avalokiteśvara was ambivalent. On the one hand, he occasionally promoted the link between the Karmapas and Avalokiteśvara. In a prayer to the Jinasāgara lineage, for example, he calls Karma Pakshi "Avalokiteśvara himself, who lives on the kingdom's great plains in solitude."[81] Furthermore, when commenting on Karma Pakshi's claim to be Avalokiteśvara, he situated Düsum Khyenpa in a complex network of bodhisattvas' manifestations, reminiscent of the *Karaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* and the *Maṇi Kambum*. Part of his commentary reads:

> Avalokiteśvara has three manifestations, of body, speech, and mind: Saraha is the mind manifestation, Padmasambhava is the body manifestation, and Padampa Sanggyé is the speech manifestation. It is as if these three have the same essence, and Düsum Khyenpa is Saraha's manifestation.[82]

These connections are a forerunner to the even more complex web of connections that run through later manifestation discourses. The utility of this complexity, in this instance at least, is that it enables Rangjung Dorjé to make claims about his status indirectly, without displaying immodesty. It also connects him with three of his cultural heroes, about whom he repeatedly writes in his autobiographies. The Indian yogi Padampa Sanggyé is something of a local favorite, as he found a home in southern Tibet near where Rangjung Dorjé was born. Padmasambhava is also a particular inspiration for him, and his association with Saraha is notable in this context because, although he never states it explicitly, he sometimes hints at being Saraha's emanation.[83]

Along with this complex and indirect alignment with Avalokiteśvara, the early Karmapas' liberation stories also contain an entirely different emanation claim: that the Karmapas are emanations of the future buddha Siṃha. According to the *Sūtra of This Fortunate Eon*,[84] Siṃha will be the sixth "supreme emanation body" of this age after his teachers Śākyamuni, and the fifth, future Buddha Maitreya.[85]

The first person to make such claims for the Karmapas was Lama Zhang, Düsum Khyenpa's friend, and it has echoes of the association between Gampopa and Candragrabha Kumāra, whic Lama Zhang was promoting at the same time.[86] For later tellers of these emanation tales, there was little contradiction between these two claims; Avalokiteśvara could just be recast again, this time as Siṃha. Writing in his *Liberation Story in Verse*, Rangjung Dorjé, however, was less certain the two stories are compatible. "I wonder how I will be propelled by my aspirations in future births?" he asks:

> The illustrious Karmapa prophesied that in the future he would enter the presence of the wheel-turning king, the dharma holder, Maitreya, and be [known as] "Great Being [*bdag nyid chen po*]." Then he would emerge from [Maitreya's] lineage (i.e., become Siṃha]. I have prepared similarly [to him]. I have engaged in bodhisattva's practices. But in the meantime, I have also been inspired by the lord of compassion, the Buddha Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, Vajrapani, and so forth, and I have been practicing the liberation of Jinasāgara. I wonder if I will attain [buddhahood through] this practice? . . . If I commit to it, this could happen. If I commit to it, the continuum that [now] sprouts fanciful, mental conceptions will [eventually] produce a completely pure result.[87]

Rangjung Dorjé's puzzlement in this passage speaks to a level of trans-life complexity that is absent from all previous emanation narratives. Narratively speaking, it is much easier to cast yourself or someone else as the emanation of a celestial bodhisattva than it is to deal with the recorded ambitions of another person. Aligning the wishes of three such persons is even more difficult. When the system of reincarnation was more established, the Karmapas made this process easier by living in line with the Karmapa script: birth attended by auspicious signs, recognition, enthronement, ordination, the transmission of the lineage by respected gurus, teaching career, and a death accompanied by auspicious signs. As this life script was based on the standard monastic-Kagyü lineal script that Gampopa established, Rangjung Dorjé already lived much of it. But as this passage shows, during his life, elements of the Karmapa narrative were still unresolved. He had to align his own experience with the aspirations and ideas of not-quite-others who were also his lineal predecessors. He had to balance respect for their claims with the needs of the entire Karmapas' story and its developing traditions.

The emanation claims Rangjung Dorjé encountered in his predecessors' birth and liberation stories were multiple and fragmentary. The association with Avalokiteśvara enhanced their prestige and linked the Karmapas into a

Plateau-wide phenomenon, but the already fragmentary and diffuse nature of this tradition meant it would not have sustained the continuing, located, and distinctive institution that the Karmapa body rosary became. A significant contributor to the Karmapa tradition's endurance was a switch in focus that Rangjung Dorjé made in the Karmapa narrative; he downplayed the idea of emanations in his writing and brought to the fore the associated idea of rebirth. Rebirths, and specifically concatenate rebirths, provided a continuity that emanation narratives lacked. Communities could be built around rebirths, and through the process of remembrance, recognition, and enthronement, they could also be involved in their traditions. What is more, the idea of rebirth evoked the family lineage and with it the idea of a located household in a way that emanations did not. The Karmapas' continued association with monastic, intellectual, tantric lineages—and particularly the Avalokiteśvara lineage—sanctified them, and the rebirth narrative allowed the Karmapa tradition to become both communal and located.

NOTES

1. A *śāstra* is an Indian commentary to the Buddha's teachings, Tib. *bstan bcos*.

2. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 56.5.6–58.1.2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 229.3–5.

3. *Rang bzo* is described in Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 205n7; and Jacob Dalton, *The Taming of Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 16, 125. *Rang bzo* was a particular bane of Sa skya Paṇḍita, whose literary project was dedicated to eliminating instances of it in the Tibetan practice of Buddhism: see Jonathan Gold, *The Dharma's Gatekeepers: Sakya Paṇḍita on Buddhist Scholarship in Tibet* (New York: City University of New York Press, 2007), 3–6.

4. Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 39–135; Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, 1–26.

5. These histories are called *rgyal rabs*; the syllable *rabs* is also in *skye rabs*. It is often used to translate the Sanskrit term *vaṃśa*. See note 41 below.

6. The household has been a central focus of modern anthropological studies of Tibet. In 2016 Jonathan Samuels compared this anthropological approach with historical writing that has tended to focus on the idea of "clans": "Are We Legend? Reconsidering Clan in Tibet," *Revue d'etudes tibétaines* 37 (2016): 293. He points out that, "the term *clan* may, generally speaking, refer to a centralized corporate group, owning territories, and sometimes linked with particular forms of political or administrative structure; yet equally it may refer to a descent category, comprising individuals living in a dispersed fashion." Tibetan descriptions of familial lineages, by contrast, tend to focus only on rulers and rivalries. I have taken Samuels's arguments on board in this examination of historical Tibetan society and will refer to households and family lineages as opposed to clans. Samuels draws on several anthropological studies to make his points. One of these is Barbara Aziz, "Some Notions about Descent and Residence in Tibetan Society," in *Contributions to the Anthropology of Nepal*, ed. C. von Fűrer-Haimendorf (Warminster, UK: Aris & Philips, 1974), 23–29. Aziz's study focused on Ding

ri glang skor in the 1970s, a region near where Rang byung rdo rje was born seven hundred years earlier.

7. Dotson, *The Victory Banquet*, describes several instances in which the followers of these local rulers change their allegiance due to their leader's incompetence or duplicity.

8. Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan, *Ta si byang chub rgyal mtshan gyi bka' chems mthong ba don ldan* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1989), 133–340.

9. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 129.5; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 292.5.

10. Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan, *Ta si byang chub rgyal mtshan gyi bka' chems*; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*.

11. The Mgar were patrons of Dus gsum mkhyen pa's friend, Bla ma Zhang. They later took over the leadership roles of his monastery, Tshal gung thang. See Per K. Sørensen, Guntram Hazod, and Tsering Gyalpo, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain: Ecclesiastic and Secular Hegemony in Medieval Tibet; A Study of Tshal Gung-thang* (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 2007), 29–37.

12. Martin Mills talks about these flexible boundaries in *Identity, Ritual, and State in Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Routledge, 2003).

13. The only reference to any member of his family in any of his biographies is in Si tu Paṇ chen's *Zla ba chu shel*, 395, where he speaks of a grand-nephew who acts as an attendant.

14. Tib. *btsad po dbu'i rigs* (noble lineage). *Karma pak shi'i bka' 'bum*, 89.5.

15. Rémi Chaix, "Si tu paṇ chen and the House of Sde dge: A Demanding but Beneficial Relationship," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* 7 (2013): 17–48.

16. Bsod nams 'od zer, *Grub chen O rgyan pa'i rnam par thar pa byin brlabs kyi chu rgyun* (Gangtok: Sherab gyaltsen lama, 1976), 197–200.

17. Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger (trans.) with Guntrum Hazod, *Shel dkar chos 'Byung: History of the "White Crystal," Religion and Politics of Southern La Stod* (Vienna: Verlag Der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 12.

18. Chaix, "Si tu paṇ chen and the House of Sde dge," 20.

19. Hildegard Diemberger, "Blood, Sperm, Soul, and the Mountain: Gender Relations, Kinship, and Cosmovision among the Khumbo," in *Gendered Anthropology*, ed. Teresa del Valle (London: Routledge, 1993), 98.

20. Wallace, *The Inner Kālacakratantra*, 110.

21. Rang byung rdo rje does this repeatedly. See, for example, *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar*, 373, and *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 408.

22. Mohan Wijayaratna examines the early development of this phenomena in *Buddhist Monastic Life: According to the Texts of the Theravada Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 39–50.

23. I have restricted my discussion to monks because I have not found any information in these texts about nuns. As I will discuss in the final chapter, in Rang byung rdo rje's writing, women are notable by their absence.

24. Wim van Spengen, *Tibetan Border Worlds: A Geo-Historical Analysis of Trade and Traders* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 77.

25. *Rje dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhal chems,* in Jamgon Labrang, *Zhal gdams gces btul*, 261.

26. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 888.

27. Wim van Spengen, *Tibetan Border* Worlds, 79–85.

28. Rgwa Lo tsā ba, *Ser gling,* 38; *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 368.

29. Several other studies have examined his contribution to this view: Brunnhölzl, *In Praise of Dharmadhātu*; Brunnhölzl, *Luminous Heart*; and Schaeffer, "The Enlightened heart

of Buddhahood." But the full scope of Rang byung rdo rje's contribution to Tibet's intellectual history has yet to be thoroughly investigated.

30. Paul Harrison, "A Brief History of the Tibetan Bka' 'gyur," in Cabezón and Jackson, *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, 80 , with a general discussion at 70–94. A discussion of this process can also be found in Kurtis Schaeffer, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 27–43. The production of this canon is revisited in chapter 8.

31. Schwieger, "History as Myth," 69.

32. Rang byung rdo rje, *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *ja, Dbu ma chos dbyings bstod pa'i rnam par bshad pa*, 22. This translation follows Klaus-Dieter Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within: Go Lotsāwa's Mahāmudrā Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga* (Boston: Wisdom, 2008), 53.

33. Brunnhölzl, *Luminous Heart*, 409.

34. Stephan Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā: Magic and Ritual in Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 229.

35. Rang byung rdo rje, *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *ca,'Phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug gi yon tan gyi cha shas la bstod pa*, 19–26.

36. Sa skya PaN chen Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, *Sdom gsum rab dbye dang sdom gsum gtan 'bebs 'jam dbyangs bla ma'i dgongs rgyan gyi rnam 'grel*, vol. 1, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, in (Pe cin [Beijing], China: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2004), 31–157.

37. Tsering Wangchuk, *The Uttaratantra in the Land of Snows: Tibetan Thinkers Debate the Centrality of the Buddha Nature Treatise* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 28.

38. Wangchuk, *The Uttaratantra in the Land of* Snows, 103, 109.

39. The distinction between these two approaches formed the basis for a debate that continues even today: the so-called intrinsic (*rang stong*) and extrinsic (*gzhan stong*) understandings of emptiness debate. An analysis of this debate and Rang byung rdo rje's contribution to it or lack thereof is beyond the scope of this present study. Other studies of Rang byung rdo rje's writing have, however, discussed it: Schaeffer, "The Enlightened Heart of Buddhahood," 25–36; Brunnhölzl, *In Praise of Dharmadhātu*, 142, 159–197; Brunnhölzl, *Luminous Heart*, 79–125; and Seegers, "Lord of the Teachings," 126–133. Rang byung rdo rje's role or lack thereof in this debate is also mentioned in the following analyses: Susan K. Hookham, *The Buddha Within: Tathagatagarbha Doctrine According to the Shentong Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhaga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 136; Cyrus Stearns, *The Buddha from Dolpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 47–48; and Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within*, 51–75. Suffice to say that Rang byung rdo rje would have landed on the *gzhan stong* side of the argument became he aligns the nature of the mind with the *dharmakāya* and presents this nature as natural luminosity (*'od gsal*) rather than a nonaffirming negative (*med dgags*). But despite this alignment, he never uses either *rang stong* or *gzhan stong* and, therefore, labeling him a proponent of either is anachronistic.

40. Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 114.

41. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 140. *Vaṃśa* is also the name of a Pāli literary genre that describes the religious genealogies of the Buddha, his teachings in countries other than India, and even *stūpas* and relics. It is included within the names of many royal chronicles, including the royal chronicles of Sri Lanka. See Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 87.

42. Jacob Dalton, "A Crisis of Doxography: How Tibetans Organized Tantra during the 8th–12th Centuries," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 115–181. In Sanskrit and Tibetan these four stages are called (1) action tantras (Skt. *kriyātantra*; Tib. *bya rgyud*); (2) conduct tantras (Skt. *caryātantra*; Tib. *spyod rgyud*); (3) yoga tantras (Skt. *yogatantra*; Tib. *rnal 'byor rgyud*); and (4) and highest yoga tantras (Skt. *niruttarayogatantra*; Tib. *rnal 'byor rgyud*).

43. As far as I am aware, there has not been an in-depth academic study of this set of yogas: (1) inner heat (Skt. *caṇḍaliyoga*; Tib. *gtum mo*); (2) illusory body (Skt. *māyākāyoga*; Tib. *sgyu lus*); (3) clear light (Skt. *prabhāsvarayoga*; Tib. *'od gsal*); (4) dreams (Skt. *svapanayoga*; Tib. *rmi lam*); (5) in-between state (Skt. *antarābhavayoga*; Tib. *bar do*); and (6) transference (Skt. *saṃkrāntiyoga*; Tib. *'pho ba*). *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum* includes a commentary on them, vol. *tha, Zab lam nā ro chos drug gi gsal byed spyi chings khrid yig dang bcas pa*, 537–562.

44. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 46.4; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 221.1–2.

45. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 87.2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 253.5.

46. Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, discusses this relationship at length, "Guru-Devotion in the Bka' brgyud pa Tradition: The Single Means to Realisation," in *Mahāmudrā and the Bka' brgyud Tradition*, ed. Jackson and Kapstein, 211–257. But he does not present the idea of "one's own mind as guru" in the same way that Rang byung rdo rje does.

47. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 115.3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 277.6–278.1.

48. Peter Alan Roberts, *The Biographies of Rechungpa: The Evolution of a Tibetan Hagiography* (London: Routledge, 2007), 1–2.

49. Gerald James Larson, "Differentiating the Concepts of 'Yoga' and 'Tantra' in Sanskrit Literary History," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 3 (2009): 490.

50. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 74–76; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 244–245.

51. There is an ongoing controversy about the recognition of the seventeenth Karmapa. Two Kar ma Bka' brgyud lineage holders, Tai Situ and Rgyal tshab Rinpoche, the Dalai Lama, the government of the People's Republic of China,: and by far the majority of the Tibetan community recognize O rgyan 'phrin las rdo rje (1985–) as the seventeenth Karmapa. But the late lineage holder Zhwa dmar Rinpoche and his followers recognize 'Phrin las mtha' yas rdo rje (1983–).

52. This deity is known by many names and comes in many forms. I am using the most common form to aid comprehension.

53. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *ta*, includes (1) *Dpal padma rgyal po'i kyi bsdus don*, 211–217; (2) *Padma zab mo'i rgyud kyi bsdus don*, 217–220; (3) *Padma zab mo'i rgyud kyi mngon rtogs*, 220–224; (4) *Thugs rje chen po padma zab pa'i bskyed rdzogs kyi man ngag*, 224–227; (5) *Thugs rje chen po'i bzlas pa'i man ngag* 227–230; (6) *Padma snang ba'i dbang gi cho ga gsal bar byed pa bcas la sdeb*, 230–274; (7) *Rgyal ba rgya mtsho'i dbang bskur dang tshogs mchod kyi lag len bcas la ldeb*, 275–358; and *Spyan ras gzigs kyi sgo nas sgrib pa sbyong ba ldeb*, 359–373.

54. Matthew Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Maṇi Bka'-'bum* and the Cult of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet," in *Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation*, ed. Stephen Goodman and Ronald Davidson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 79–93.

55. Sam van Schaik, "The Tibetan Avalokiteśvara Cult in the Tenth Century: Evidence from the Dunhuang Manuscripts," in *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis: Studies in Its Formative Period, 900–1400 PIATS 2003*, eds. Ronald Davidson and Christian Wedemeyer (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 55–72.

56. Van der Kuijp, "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," 21.

57. Van der Kuijp, "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," 21.

58. Ivette M. Vargas-O'Brian, "The Life of dGe slong ma dPal mo: The Experience of a Leper, Founder of a Fasting Ritual, a Transmitter of Buddhist Teachings on Suffering and Renunciation in Tibetan Religious History," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 24, no. 2 (2001): 157–185.

59. 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. *pha*, 1a, 1b.

60. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 381.

61. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 79–82; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 247–249.

62. *Bka' chems ka khol ma*. Ronald Davidson provides an overview of this text and looks at its influence on Tibetan historical narratives in "The Kingly Cosmogonic Narrative and Tibetan Histories: Indian Origins, Tibetan Space, and the *Bka' 'chems ka khol ma* Synthesis," *Lhung rta* 16 (2003): 64–83.

63. Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Maṇi Bka'-'bum*," 83.

64. *Maṇi Bka' 'bum: A Collection of Rediscovered Teachings Focussing upon the Tutelary Deity Avalokiteśvara (Mahākaruṇika)* (New Delhi: Trayang and Jamyang Samten, 1975), 29; translated in Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Maṇi Bka'-'bum*," 89. The last treasure revealer to add to this story, in the mid-thirteenth century, was from La stod.

65. Tib. *ba la ha*, from Skt. Balaha. The story of this horse is summarized in John Clifford Holt, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

66. *Maṇi Bka' 'bum: A Collection of Rediscovered Teachings Focussing upon the Tutelary Deity Avalokiteśvara (Mahākaruṇika)* (New Delhi: Trayang and Jamyang Samten, 1975), 30; translated in Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Maṇi Bka'-'bum*," 89.

67. Alexander Studholme, *Origins of Om Manipadme Hum: A Study of the Karandavyuaha Sutra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

68. Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Maṇi Bka'-'bum*," 86.

69. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 151.

70. R. A. Stein, "Un ensemble sémantique tibétain: Créer et procréer, être et devenir, vivre, nourrir, et guérir," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 36, no. 2 (1973): 417. Other related words include *rdzu 'phrul*, Skt. *ṛddhi,* which means "magic"; Tib. *mig 'phrul*, Skt. *indra-jāla*, which means both "delusion" and "illusion"; Tib. *cho 'phrul*, Skt. *prātihārya*, which means, among other things, "magical transformation."

71. Van der Kuijp seems to assume that this term was always used to refer to reincarnate teachers. Based on this assumption, he then argues that Khro phu lo tsā ba byams pa dpal's (1173–1225) use of the term *sprul sku* to describe two Indian masters, Mitrayogi and Vikhyatadeva, is an example of a Tibetan recognizing two Indian teachers as "reincarnates": "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," 28. Daniel Berounský analyzed the text to which van der Kuijp referred in this article, *Khro phu Lo tsā ba'i rnam thar yab sras mjal ba*, folios 6b, 7b and 12a, "Entering Dead Bodies and the Miraculous Power of the Kings: The Landmark of Karma Pakshi's Reincarnation in Tibet. Part 1," *Mongolo-Tibetica Pragensia' 10: Linguistics, Ethnolinguistics, Religion and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2010): 7–33. In all of its occurrences in this text, the term *sprul sku* could easily be read as a reflection of guru yoga practice rather than an acknowledgment of reincarnate status. None of those described using this appellation are called *the sprul sku of* anyone else, merely a *sprul sku*.

72. For an unfolding discussion about the controversy surrounding this practice, see Roger Jackson, "Sa skya paṇḍita's Account of the Bsam yas Debate: History As Polemic," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5, no. 1 (1982): 89–99; Leonard van der Kuijp, "On the Sources for Sa skya Paṇḍita's Notes on the Bsam yas Debate," *Journal of the*

International Association of Buddhist Studies 9, no. 2 (1986): 147–153; Michael Broido, "Sa-skya Paṇḍita, the White Panacea, and the Hva-shang Doctrine," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10, no. 2 (1987): 27–68; David Jackson, "Sa-skya Paṇḍita the Polemicist: Ancient Debates and Modern Interpretations,"; and David Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means: Tibetan Controversies on the "SelfSufficient White Remedy"* (*Dkar po chig thub*) (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1994).

73. Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born*, 43–46.

74. Rang byung rdo rje, *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. *ca, Mtshur phu'i bstod pa, Bstod pa dam pa: gnas kyi tshul gsal bar byed pa snyan ngag rgyan gyi me tog gsal ba'i sgron me rdzogs*, 35–36. Chapter 4 will examine this song in more detail.

75. Van der Kuijp, "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," 24. Rangjung Dorjé claims to have been Potowa Rinchen Sel but ignores his association with Mañjuśrī. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 23–24; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 203–204.

76. Van der Kuijp, "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," 16.

77. Van der Kuijp, "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," 18–19.

78. Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Maṇi Bka'-'bum*," 88; and Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 2000, 150.

79. Rgwa Lo tsā ba, *Ser gling,* 66.

80. Rang byung rdo rje, *Rang byung rdo rje's gsung 'bum*, vol. *nga, Bla ma rin po che'i rnam par thar pa'o: Karma pa'i rnam thar,* \276.

81. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 80.7–81.1; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 248.2–3.

82. Rang byung rdo rje, *Bla ma rin po che'i rnam par thar pa'o,* 276–277.

83. Rang byung rdo rje does not pursue the direct connection with Padmasambhava and Pa dam pa sangs rgyas, but he does encounter them regularly in visions.

84. In Sanskrit, this text is called *Āryabhadrakalpikasūtra* and in Tibetan *'Phags pa bskal pa bzang po'i mdo.* Within the Lhasa edition of the *Bka' 'gyur*, the list of future buddhas is given on folio 154b, line 1.

85. This does not mean that the early Karmapas were described contemporaneously as "supreme emanation bodies" (*mchog gi sprul sku)* or even as mere "emanation bodies" (*sprul sku)*. These commentators have merely suggested that they will achieve this state.

86. In Jamgon Kongtrul Labrang, *Dbel lden dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhal gdams gces btul,* Gzhon nu byang chub, "Re'u mig brga rtsa brgyad pa," 113.

87. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 400–401.

3

Communities

Won't your prestige and good luck
Seem like a dream when you die?
Won't you leave all your servants and relatives,
Close and distant, and travel into the unknown?

Even the tall, strong castle you built
Will not protect you when you die.
All these formulated things, marked with your fingerprints,
May be in good condition, but they will not [get up] and follow you.

Rangjung Dorjé,
on first arriving at Karma Monastery, 1302[1]

A repeated theme in Rangjung Dorjé's autobiographies is a description of a journey at the behest of a person or group to carry out a religious ceremony, give a teaching, or negotiate between two warring factions. He traveled a lot but he rarely traveled alone, and wherever he went, he met new people. He stayed in small homes, communal houses, and palaces, recording his impressions about the wretched, the sanctified, and the wealthy people he met in his autobiographies and songs. He encountered, in other words, Doreen Massey's space-filling multiplicity of "stories-so-far."

The people he encountered in his life were not just the subject of his writing, however— they were also an essential component of his identity as a person, a community member, and a Karmapa. The developing Karmapa reincarnation lineage depended on local and larger communities. Its first line of support was the monks of its monasteries and other lineage members, but they, in turn, were

supported by local communities, their families, social and religious networks, and people further afield. These communities have been the Karmapas followers, its sponsors, and its audience. They also helped to create the Karmapa institution that has supported its body rosary and its traditions. They have also always been plural: communities rather than a community.

Rangjung Dorje's relationship with these communities shaped the Karmapa institution. To garner continuing support from them, he changed the Karmapas' story from one of "inconceivable emanations" to one that was more familiar to them: the rhythms of birth, life, death, and rebirth. He depended on these communities, particularly their authoritative leaders, to recognize his special status as a reincarnate. And his story blended their communal identity narratives with the Karmapas' stories. He wrote about the relationship between the Karmapas and "the monks of Tsurpu," "the hermits of Karma," "the people of Kongpo," and "all this country's people."[2] His identification with the stories of Avalokiteśvara, Padmasambhava, and the Tibetan Empire linked him into a larger, shared, Tibetan narrative. His relationship with Mongol princes and kings was also very important to the tradition's continuity. Even though that relationship sometimes threatened the Karmapas' existence, it also connected them into one of the largest polities in world history.

THE REBIRTH OF REBIRTH

Rangjung Dorje's transformation in the presentation of the Karmapa lineage from a display of multiple, erratic, and disparate emanations to one of consistent, reliable, seeable rebirths was perhaps his most effective method of community engagement. It eventually allowed everyone from religious elites to locals to be involved in the process of reincarnation; religious elites recognized young reincarnates, locals attended their enthronements, and all prayed for new rebirths to come quickly. But as with many of the components that made the reincarnation tradition successful, there is little sense in the early Karmapas' writing that those involved intended this outcome. Instead, the relationship between rebirth and manifestation narratives in the early Karmapas' life stories seems to have evolved as a reflection of their personalities.

Düsum Khyenpa's birth and liberation stories described his distant "past births" in diverse and disconnected abodes, but as these stories moved closer to his present, they multiplied. In his present and future, he was said to have manifested multiple forms in assorted abodes. His story began with rebirths, in other words, and ended in emanations. Karma Pakshi's autobiographies reproduced this pattern.

He too spoke of past births in various abodes, but went on to call himself "an emanation" of Düsum Khyenpa and spoke of multiple, simultaneous emanations in his present, including the emanation of a bodhisattva who lived in Tuṣita and would become the fifth Buddha of the eon, Siṃha.[3] Rangjung Dorjé repeated his two predecessors' claims and, therefore, aligned himself with them, but, as chapter 2 described, he also "wondered about them."[4] This wondering echoed through his writing.

The *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*, written or dictated when Rangjung Dorjé was a child, began to transform the Karmapas' presentation of reincarnation. It reformulated Karma Pakshi's narrative by acknowledging the primary emanation, the Great Being in Tuṣita, but it presented him as a trainee. Unlike Karma Pakshi's magnificent, celestial bodhisattva, Rangjung Dorjé's Great Being stays home to meditate while other gods noisily "enjoy heavenly delights," expresses doubt about his teaching abilities, and has to experience the discomfort and unconsciousness of birth.[5]

In the *Liberation Story in Verse*, written when he was in middle age, Rangjung Dorjé is even more circumspect about his own status. In this work, he only claims to be blessed by the Great Being in order to expand that celestial bodhisattva's activities in Tibet. Furthermore, unlike the previous Karmapas, his memories of past lives are restricted to those of human, male, Indians and Tibetans who were practitioners of his Buddhist lineages.[6]

Among other memories, he recalls having been the Buddha's student, a monk at Nālandā Monastery, a student of the *mahāsiddha* Sakarapa, Śantarakṣita's and Padmasambhava's student Gyel Chokyang, the early Kadam teacher Potowa Rinchen Sel, and the previous two Karmapas.[7] As Rangjung Dorjé's list moves toward his present, it becomes more concatenate and historical. Potowa and the two Karmapas not only lived concatenate lives—Potowa died five years before Düsum Khyenpa's birth—but the details of their lives were recorded. This is a development in past-life narratives. Nyangrel and other treasure tradition proponents claimed to have been either long-dead imperial actors or merely provided the names of other lifetimes. Others, like Nyakséwa and Karma Pakshi had claimed past lives that were concatenate to them or at to least historical beings. Karma Pakshi had claimed to be the emanation of a person who had said he would remanifest. But Rangjung Dorjé provided details about three concatenate past lives, two of whose protagonists had stated their intention to reincarnate and already been connected to each other.

In this description of his past lives, Rangjung Dorjé appears to be exercising an either culturally prescribed or genuine humility. His vision of his past is as the student of people he respects. The claims are still extraordinary: they describe a

person guided by lineage luminaries for millennia who has been able to direct his consciousness from birth to birth. But he was not making the audacious claims the previous two Karmapas made. His predecessors had described the multiple emanations of a celestial being. Rangjung Dorjé does not refute their claims, but he choses to focus on singular, concatenate rebirths of historical figures instead. Along with this change in focus comes a change in language. He does not use the words *sprul* and *'phrul* to describe himself or his future emanations.[8] Like the Buddha in the *jātaka* tales, he talks about his past, present, and future identities, abodes, and births, and identifies himself with past beings by saying "that was me."

This language choice brings his narrative into line with other, eleventh- to thirteenth-century past-life stories, in which the claimant refers to a recently deceased historical figure. These narratives tend to talk about the link between lives as rebirth rather than emanation. By describing himself as "one of Düsum Khyenpa's manifestations," Karma Pakshi was going against this trend. Chögyel Pakpa's student and biographer Yeshé Gyeltsen claimed that Chögyel Pakpa was both Buddha Vairocana's "display" (*rnam par rol pa*) and the birth (*skye ba*) of a well-known yogi named Satön Ripa (thirteenth century).[9] Gyelwa Téné (ca. 1120–1217), a teacher in Padampa Sanggyé's Pacification lineage, for example, claimed to remember his past life as the deceased teacher Mal Tsöndrü (eleventh century), and, his biography claims, he was identified as his birth (*sku skye ba*) by others.[10] Rangjung Dorjé's friend and mentor Künga Özer (1258–1316)[11] of Nyédo Monastery claimed to be the rebirth of Orgyenpa's guru, Götsangpa (1189–1258), and a young woman named Künden Réma (1260–1339) was said to be the rebirth of Götsangpa's consort Drowa Zangmo (d. 1259).

Although it may not seem like a large conceptual leap to make from emanation to rebirth—and the Karmapas' and Chögyal Pakpa's narratives even managed to straddle both—this shift toward birth narratives would go on to have a profound impact. Not only did it allow more people to be involved in the processes of reincarnation, it also helped reorganize Tibetan society. Descriptions of emanations were, by their nature, otherworldly, but births were the foundation of Tibetan society. Births built households and family lineages. Tibetan monasteries were transferred between generations from uncles to nephews, transfers that were mediated by female relatives. Rebirth lineages bypassed this familial involvement, and by bypassing familial involvement, they bypassed women's involvement. They allowed for bodily continuity through unrelated female surrogates and removed women from their primary role as the producers and nurturers of bodies. They also changed Tibet's inheritance model.

The precedent of succession had been set by Karma Pakshi's acquisition of Düsum Khyenpa's monasteries. Although, at that stage, this inheritance was

perhaps more cultural than material, as Düsum Khyenpa's monasteries were either run-down or in ruins. Rangjung Dorjé's move to Tsurpu brought familial and reincarnation lineages into the same residence, and in this contested space, after two generations, rebirth eventually defeated family.

Part of the reason for this defeat was some of the distinct advantages that rebirth had over familial reproduction for the maintenance of religious institutions. Rebirths, for example, were not generally hard to find, so there was no problem with the production of heirs, and they—usually—came in a single file so there was no competition for the teaching throne. Through its production of consistent and singular bodies, this tradition presented an appealing contrast to political and religious familial lineages that—particularly during Rangjung Dorjé's times—had a habit of producing a dearth or surfeit of eligible heirs. As those who came forward as rebirths—at least in Rangjung Dorjé's time and for decades after—usually based their claims on extraordinary skills, the rebirth lineages also guaranteed charismatic leaders.

RECOGNITION

This focus on the familial aspect of rebirth highlights an important but easily overlooked aspect of the reincarnation tradition; in order for a body rosary to continue, it needed to procure bodies. The creation and sustenance of bodies—particularly in harsh environments like Tibet—is a communal event; it depends on the creation of marriage alliances, the production of food to sustain the parents' and children's bodies, and the communal protection of these bodies from illness and war. From Rangjung Dorjé's time onward, very young children were offered by their families to fulfill the role of reincarnates. Strong social incentives were needed to enable this kind of gift, and they came in the form of the community respect, education, resources, and property that accompanied a child's recognition. This status was granted to the child (and reflected onto their family) by the whole community, and this community granted it in dependence on the act of recognition. The whole system depended, in other words, on the community's belief that elite religious figures knew where, when, and how consciousness migrates between lives.[12]

Faith in these beings was underpinned by the interlocking edifice of their lineal networks. These networks bestowed authority down through generations, and reaffirmed the possession of abilities within any one generation by the exchange of teachings, compliments, and authorizations. Established lineage holders from various traditions strengthened each other's influence through the mutual recognition of realization. When one of this interconnected group recognized a child

as a rebirth, emanation, or both, the child received the reflected support of that being's entire religious network.

At least during the early stages of the tradition, this recognition had to be affirmed by multiple sources for the claimant's status to stick. Claimants themselves had to acquiesce to their proscribed status, if not promote it. They then needed the backing of substantial religious figures and some support from their predecessors' religious community. Political support was also helpful.[13] The multiple forms of this support were easier to offer to a person claiming to be a recently deceased person's rebirth than an emanation. If the leaders of a group of disciples banded together to recognize the reincarnation of their deceased teacher, their claim was more immediate and emotional than an abstract claim regarding an individual's ontological status. The moving narratives of their reunions between students and their teachers reflect this. Along with their individual reputations, developed narrative, shared lineages, the early Karmapas needed all four of these forms of recognition to establish their tradition: self-recognition, the advocacy of respected religious figures, the support of their predessesor's religious community, and political support.

Although Karma Pakshi's recognition as a teenager is often described as the first act of recognition in Tibet, there were precedents. The Kadam master Jayülpa (1075–1138) recognized a young student, Gyergom Tsultrim Senggé (1090–1171) as the rebirth of his own teacher, and in a striking prelude to Rangjung Dorjé's recognition, he returned his predecessor's hat to him.[14] Although the story is told in late sources, it is also possible that Gampopa recognized one of his students, Layak José (twelfth century) as the rebirth of another student.[15] As well as remembering past lives in which he befriended monkey kings, Pakmodrupa recognized his student Kyopa Jikten Gönpo (1143–1217) as "a tenth-level bodhisattva."[16] And the association between Chögyel Pakpa and Satön Ripa came about through recognition. It could even be argued that the communal acceptance of Düsum Khyenpa's and Pakmodrupa's past-life remembrances, and both of them being granted the title "Düsum Khyenpa," was a preliminary form of recognition.

Karma Pakshi's recognition followed on from these already established precedents and developed upon them, but it was not a straightforward process. It was Düsum Khyenpa's grand-student, Pomdrakpa, who suggested a link between Karma Pakshi and Düsum Khyenpa. At this stage of the reincarnation tradition's development, this recognition was far from formal; there was no ceremony, no enthronement, and no other formalization of the recognition. In Karma Pakshi's version of the encounter, recorded in his autobiography, both protagonists reflected on the importance of Karma Pakshi's historical connections with the Kagyü teachings, but they did not grant the act any historical significance. Pomdrakpa

began by commenting that Karma Pakshi has "karmic potential" and a particular affiliation with Gampopa's lineage. It was only later that he experienced visions clarifying the connection between his young student and Düsum Khyenpa.[17]

As a primary student of Düsum Khyenpa's primary student, Pomdrakpa's religious network had invested him with the authority to transmit the lineage. His choice to bring Karma Pakshi into Düsum Khyenpa's teaching lineage was, in itself, no small act. It granted Karma Pakshi lineal authority and an increased social status. His reincarnate status was in many ways secondary to this lineal connection. The identification of Karma Pakshi with Düsum Khyenpa was not established by the singular act of recognition; it developed over the course of Karma Pakshi's life as he continuously performed and narrated the connection.

Rangjung Dorjé was recognized earlier and more dramatically by Karma Pakshi's student Orgyenpa. In the records of this event, both participants are much more aware of its import. Perhaps part of the reason for Orgyenpa's creation of this recognition event was his previous experience in recognizing reincarnates. Previously, Orgyenpa had supported the claims of both Künga Özer of Nyédo and Künden Réma to be the rebirths of his teacher Götsangpa and Götsangpa's consort Drowa Zangmo.[18]

A good part of the reason the story of Orgyenpa's recognition of Rangjung Dorje had more impact than his previous recognitions was its principle prop, the black hat. Orgyenpa had only become Karma Pakshi's student toward the end of the second Karmapa's life. But he must have made quite an impression on the aging Karmapa, because he not only granted him enough tantric empowerments and compliments to install Orgyenpa as one of his lineage holders, he also gave him his famous black hat. Orgyenpa later reported to his other students that he took this gift as a sign that the two would meet again in the Karmapa's next life.[19] On the day he met the five-year-old Rangjung Dorjé, he gave him a symbolic empowerment and returned the hat. Following this, he took the young boy into his residence, cared for him, and gave him an education. In the songs he composed at the end of his life in Xanadu, fifty years later, Rangjung Dorjé still repeatedly thanked Orgyenpa for his kindness.

THE KARMAPA INSTITUTION

By taking Rangjung Dorjé into his house, Orgyenpa opened up a world to him to which most potter's children did not have access. This kind of kindness between gurus and students is commonly reported in Tibetan biographical literature and songs. The kind of support that is less often commened on, but that clearly played

a role in the survival of the Karmapa lineage, is the work done by Orgyenpa's and the subsequent Karmapa's supporters to preserve and protect the black hat and all the other elements of the tradition. These behind-the-scenes actors have all worked to support the communally run and not-always-celebrated Karmapa institution. The Karmapa institution developed during the early Karmapas' lives and has reinforced their body rosary for over nine hundred years. It consists of all the cultural, material, religious, knowledge and rituals that have been preserved and performed in the Karmapas' name for all this time.

The multilayered narratives and discourses about lineage, emanation, rebirth, and recognition justified and created the necessity for the role of the Karmapa, and the institution was the cultural, material, and social infrastructure used for the performance of this role. The Karmapa institution's core function is to sustain the memory of the Karmapas. Like most institutionalizing processes, its development brought to light what Ricoeur has called "the two faces of the efficacy of representation: on the one hand, in terms of identification—the logical, classificatory function of representation; on the other hand, in terms of coercion, of constraint—the practical function of establishing conformity in behavior."[20] The Karmapas were granted power and influence by the maintenance of their institution, in other words, as long as they conformed to the patterns that identified Karmapas.

When Orgyenpa recognized Rangjung Dorjé as Karma Pakshi's rebirth, the combination of institution and narratives that enabled the transference of their identity was much less developed than the institution would become, but it still contained several elements that were crucial to the tradition's endurance. The most important of these were the three monasteries founded by Düsum Khyenpa and restored by Karma Pakshi: Tsurpu, Karma, and Khampo Nénang. Khampo Nénang was converted into a Gélukpa monastery in the seventeenth century, but the other two are still controlled by the Karmapas.

In many ways, these three monasteries—and particularly Tsurpu Monastery—are the key to the success of the Karmapa reincarnation lineage. They have acted as a continuing symbol of the Karmapas, a protective space for their followers, and a resource that has supported their activities. Without these seats, it is doubtful that the Karmapa institution would have been sustained. These monasteries consist not only of the physical buildings but also the monastic communities that maintain them, and they have proved to be the Karmapas' most enduring supporters. There is little doubt, for example, that Rangjung Dorjé's claim to be the Karmapa would have been much more difficult to make if he had not been given a place to stay at Tsurpu. As his story demonstrates, the symbiotic sanctifying process between these monasteries and the Karmapas has also proved essential to the lineage's success.

Another successful addition to the growing Karmapa institutions' assets was the collection and creation of holy objects at these monasteries, which served as a focus of worship during the Karmapas' interregnums. Düsum Khyenpa started this process with the construction at Tsurpu of the Drépung Stūpa, which was based on the famous Śrī Dhānyakaṭaka Stūpa at Amarāvatī in India.[21] His biography also records that he had an image of Avalokiteśvara in the form of Khasarpaṇi constructed and consecrated for the same monastery.[22]

Karma Pakshi's contributions to this collection were much more substantial. He began his restoration and refurbishing career at Kampo Nénang, where he had the buildings repaired and installed a central image of Avalokiteśvara as Mahākaruṇā in the monastery's assembly hall. He then moved on to Karma Monastery. There, after repairing the buildings, he commissioned an image of Maitreya for the main hall.[23] The principal focus of his renovations, however, was Tsurpu Monastery. Karma Pakshi dedicated much of the wealth he had accrued from his sojourns at the courts of Mongol princes and emperors to the construction of a ten-span-high image of Avalokiteśvara and a building in which to house it.[24] This project was so important to Karma Pakshi that he wrote a short liberation story about it: the *Liberation Story of the Construction of the Great Deity That Ornaments the World*.[25]

The representational structures put in place to sustain the Karmapa tradition were not only physical, however. The institution also employed conceptual supports, among which the name "Karmapa" is perhaps the most famous. The association between this body rosary and the name Karmapa developed over time. Düsum Khyenpa was not called the first Karmapa or the Karmapa in his lifetime, and Rangjung Dorjé does not call him that either. He does, however, call himself the Karmapa. "I am," he said, "the one known these days as the Karmapa." And then he makes a link between "the Karmapa(s)" and Düsum Khyenpa: "I am the Karmapa," he says, "and I am also Düsum Khyenpa. They are the same."[26] After this point, the Karmapas start to become known as the Karmapas by both their supporters and foes.

The other major symbol of the Karmapas is the black hat, and in this regard, it is notable that when Rangjung Dorjé called himself "the one known these days as the Karmapa," he defined this as "the third to wear the black-hat crown."[27] The long history of the Karmapas' black hat is evident in the way that all of the early painted images of Düsum Khyenpa, for example, including some that were probably painted during his lifetime, show him wearing a black hat.[28] And while the black hat Karma Pakshi and Rangjung Dorjé wear in contemporary paintings of them has a different design from Düsum Khyenpa's hat—even when they are included in the same image—they are still shown wearing a black hat.[29] These images suggest that although Karma Pakshi did not inherit the physical black hat

from Düsum Khyenpa, it was such a renowned symbol of his predecessor that his wearing of a black hat became part of his performance of the role of Düsum Khyenpa's emanation. It also suggests material evidence for the transfer of the black hat between Karma Pakshi and Rangjung Dorjé, and it explains why Karma Pakshi's lending the hat to Orgyenpa and the latter's returning it to Rangjung Dorjé carried such symbolic force.

Over time, the black hat also came to represent the pact between the Karmapas and the community that maintained its institution. Between Karmapa lifetimes, this community would keep the black hat; the hat would then be offered back to the new Karmapa on his enthronement. The Karmapas, in turn, would perform black-hat ceremonies for their community, in which the wearing of the hat was thought to transform them into a subtler form. Viewing the Karmapa while he wore the black hat was believed to bring about a subtle shift in the audience's perception that could encourage realization. It was supposed to give them an insight into how the Karmapa saw the world.

THE TIBETANS

Although it was concentrated in their three main seats, and particularly at Tsurpu, the Karmapas' community support and its institutions were linked into a Plateau-wide network of religious and familial allegiances, too. The first three Karmapas all traveled across central, southern, and eastern Tibet; only far-western Tibet was blocked to them by political and perhaps environmental boundaries. In the records of their travels across the Plateau, they note regional differences, but their biographies, autobiographies and songs also reflect a sense of the Plateau and its people as a single entity, an extended but connected community.

The Tibet they describe is not an isolated culture: the Karmapas' lineal forebears are from India, Karma Pakshi's and Rangjung Dorjé's political masters are Mongolian, and they travel through China, Western Xia, and Mongolia. But they do describe it as a distinct entity, and they regularly entwine Tibet's narrative with the Karmapas' story. In his reworking of their three biographies, Rangjung Dorjé pays particular attention to this connection by entwining the Karmapas' story with two cultural heroes whose identity was intrinsically linked with the Tibetan Plateau: Padmasambhava and Avalokiteśvara. His story of Tibet is the story of Padmasambhava and Avalokiteśvara.

To contemporary historians, the Tibet inhabited by these two figures, as Rangjung Dorje tells it, reads like a mixture of history and myth. Their story includes (1) events that can be substantiated in historical time and geographical

places, (2) events that are located in historical time and geographical places but cannot be substantiated, and (3) events that are located in mythical times and places. The history of pre-Mongol Tibet—as historians have pieced it together from relatively sparse textual, epigraphical, and archaeological sources—suggests that the Tibetan Empire was formed during the seventh century. It coalesced when one of Tibet's river-valley polities, the one at the foot of Mount Yarlha Shampo in the Yarlung Valley, slowly began to subsume those around it through a combination of war, politics, and marital allegiances.[30] Then, in the seventh century, the leaders of Yarlung, and particularly a charismatic young king named Tri Songtsen Gampo, "Songtsen the Wise," who possessed "the glamour of a deity . . . managed to harness the power of Tibet's warring clans and turn it outwards."[31] This outward aggression enabled the newly unified Tibetans to push beyond the Plateau. Their expansion reached its peak a hundred years after Tri Songtsen Gampo's life, in 763, during Tri Song Détsen's reign, when a Tibetan army rode into Chang'an, capital of the Chinese Tang Empire.

The imperial court also sponsored the importation of new technologies to support the expanding empire. These included standardized writing and other systems of administration, which were adapted to take advantage of already existent, indigenous systems and traditions.[32] Along with these technologies, the Tibetans also encountered and adopted another cultural system that would profoundly transform their society: Buddhism. Buddhism came to have a profound and lasting effect on Tibet, after starting life—contrary to what Rangjung Dorjé heard and said—as a new religion of an elite few.[33] Relatively few monasteries and temples were constructed during in the time of the empire. The region's first monastery, Samyé Monastery (The Inconceivable), was only consecrated in 779 CE during Tri Song Détsen's reign, after he made Buddhism the state religion in 762.[34] Shortly after this, the empire started to decline, and only sixty years later it fell apart. This disintegration occurred after the death of Tri Song Détsen's grandson, Lang Darma (d. 841), and a subsequent succession controversy led to civil war. An already-overstretched central administration collapsed under this pressure.

This is the story historical evidence suggests, but it is not the narrative Rangjung Dorjé presents in his writing. In his telling of the tale, Tri Songtsen Gampo, the first dharma king, was an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, who prepared Tibet for Buddhism.[35] His story then skips at least one hundred years and several kings to Tri Song Détsen, the bodhisattva of wisdom, Mañjuśrī in person, who established monasticism and tantra on Tibetan soil.[36] Finally, the last of the three dharma kings, Tri Relpachen, arrived. An emanation of Śākyamuni Buddha's personal bodhisattva protector, Vajrapāṇi, Relpachen tried to promote the Buddhist dharma and its monastic community in Tibet. But his evil brother, Lang Darma,

the last king of a united Tibet, stole the throne and began to persecute Buddhism. Eventually Lang Darma was assassinated by a great yogi, Pelkyi Dorjé, but the damage had already been done. The land had fallen into a dark era.

Rangjung Dorjé clearly admired the three dharma kings; but his primary hero of the imperial period is Padmasambhava: demon tamer, treasure text concealer, and second Buddha. According to the treasure tradition tales, Padmasambhava had been invited to Tibet by Tri Song Détsen to help subdue the local spirits and enable Buddhism to flourish on the Plateau. He was the most powerful being in Plateau lore, and his story was not only narrated across the Plateau, it was also inscribed in its environment. Rangjung Dorjé visited many of the sites in which Padmasambhava had supposedly meditated, subdued a demon or god, or built a temple. He tied the Karmapas' activities to those of Padmasambhava and, therefore, to Tibet's larger story.

Padmasambhava's legend says that he left Tibet during Tri Song Détsen's reign when the empire was at its peak. He was not there to witness the empire's demise. The postimperial period is known in these traditional sources as the "era of fragmentation." This is one of the few points where the two versions of Tibet's story—tradition and contemporary research—converge. They both agree that after the empire collapsed, Tibet's singular Plateau-wide Tibetan state crumbled into a network of interconnected local fiefdoms.[37]

These fiefdoms blended their authority with Buddhist lineages and continued localized rule until the Mongols arrived. In Rangjung Dorjé's writing, he refers to this entire period as a "dark age."[38] Like many of his era, he mourned the age of Tibetan dharma kings and Padmasambhava. These were kings, he claimed, who were not only emanations of bodhisattvas but were also wise, awakened, respectful of monks and gurus, and able—apparently through the sheer force of their charisma—to bring the entire Plateau into a cohesive unit. They were, in other words, nothing like the Mongols. Rangjung Dorjé's respect for the Tibetan emperors contrasts with the combination of neglect and contempt with which he treated the local rulers of his day. In the main, they were the scions of the powerful families that had maintained their influence after the fall of the empire. They had started or aligned themselves with powerful monasteries, and had later sought patronage from the Mongols.

THE EMPIRE

Rangjung Dorjé lived his entire life as a subject of the Great Khan, the Mongol emperor. For the first ten years of his life, Qubilai Khan was his emperor. During

the next forty years, ten more people were installed as Great Khans, all Qubilai's descendants. The last to be installed was his student, Toghon Temür Khan, and Rangjung Dorjé officiated at his coronation.

As an acknowledgment of Tibet's special religious status, Mongol emperors ruled it differently from their other realms. Rather than establishing direct rule on the Plateau, they set up a "patron-recipient" relationship with Tibet's most powerful religious figures and administered the region through them. These patronage relationships were complex and changing. Mongol emperors and princes subverted established systems because of their relationships with individual gurus. And the position of any patronized guru could change dramatically depending on both their personal relationship with a Mongol emperor or prince and the relative position of their patron in the Mongol's protean power structures. Karma Pakshi's story illustrates this.

Perhaps as a result of this uncertainty, Rangjung Dorjé's descriptions and references to the Mongol rulers and administrators—like the descriptions of them in Karma Pakshi's and Orgyenpa's writing—are ambivalent. Tibetan culture valorizes kings,[39] and with their inclusion in the Mongol Empire, the Tibetans had regained a king. Rangjung Dorjé, his teacher, and his predecessor do not, therefore, deride the emperor as an abstract concept or as an ideal. Neither do they question the emperor's right to rule Tibet. They merely question how the kings rule, and they are disinclined to acquiesce to their this-worldly power.

These yogis, like other Tibetan religious figures of the time, present themselves as apart from the secular world. They assume an elevated status from which they can scrutinize the worldly deeds of mere kings. They encourage the Mongol emperors to act as "dharma kings" rather than assuming this status for them. They praise them when they are well behaved and chide or ignore them when they are not. They criticize the Mongols' demands, their wars, their emissaries, their regents, and their alliances.[40] At the same time, however, they acknowledge the receipt of Mongol largesse and protection for both themselves and their communities. What none of these writers could do was ignore their Mongol rulers; instead, the central theme that runs through their descriptions of their interactions with their rulers is negotiation.

All Karma Pakshi's, Orgyenpa's, and Rangjung Dorjé's interactions with the Mongols take the form of a negotiation. From a *realpolitik* perspective, the Tibetans only had referred power in these interactions. The Mongols could have killed them all easily and destroyed their society, as they had other peoples in other places. Instead, they staked the Tibetans' knowledge of religion and the esoteric against their political and military power. These two types of power were not understood to be mutually exclusive. Mongol cultural norms attributed great worldly power

to those with otherworldly power, and the Tibetan Buddhist belief in cause and effect attributed great stores of merit to those who became kings.[41] But both sides recognized the primacy of the other over their domain. The Tibetans' Buddhist cosmology conjured lands, wealth, pleasures, and powers that enabled them to approach even history's largest contiguous land empire from a celestial perspective. The Mongolians had royalty, bureaucrats, and armies.

The armies arrived before the bureaucrats. In a series of events presaged by the rise of the Tibetan and other Central Asian empires, the people who became known as the Mongols had been a group of fractious tribes that were united by a leader, Chinggis Khan (1162–1227), and then directed their combined military skills outward. Chinggis Khan's armies, however, ranged much farther than any army before him.

During their initial march of conquest, they bypassed Tibet. Despite later claims to the contrary in Tibetan and Mongol histories, there is little evidence that Chinggis Khan had much to do with Tibetans or Tibetan Buddhism. During his reign and the reign of his son Ögödei (1186–1241; r. 1229–1241), there were only sporadic exchanges between the Mongols and the Tibetans, probably instituted through intermediaries, like the Buddhist rulers of Uighurs and the Western Xia kingdom. The Western Xia also played a particular role in the lives of the early Karmapas. Before they were conquered by the Mongols in 1227, the Western Xia had established ties with Tibetan gurus, including Düsum Khyenpa, who sent one of his students to act as a teacher to their royal family.[42] And even after the Mongols destroyed their cities and all but wiped out their societies, the third and fourth Karmapas visited what remained of their royal households.[43]

If they had not been all but wiped out by the Mongols, the Western Xia would have been a convenient staging point from which the Tibetans could have proselytized in Central Asia. It was not to be. Instead they had to deal directly with the Mongols. Despite their limited initial contacts with the Tibetans, by the 1220s, the Mongols had surrounded them on three sides: west, north, and northeast. Another attempt to conquer the mountainous region seemed inevitable. It happened in the late 1230s. At that time, the Mongol prince Köten (ca. 1206–ca. 1251), Ögödei's son, who was in charge of the eastern area of the empire to Tibet's northeast, ordered an invasion. The invasion, headed by Dorta the Black, set off from the Mongol base at Liangzhou, in present-day Gansu province, and sacked several Tibetan monasteries, including Radreng Monastery and Gyel Temple north of Lhasa. Drigung Monastery, which was in the same region, was not attacked. Legend has it that its inhabitants thwarted the Mongols by throwing rocks at them.[44] The Mongols withdrew from Tibet shortly after passing Drigung.

A decade later, the next Great Khan, Güyüg (1206–1248; r. 1246–1248), who was Ögödei's son and Köten's brother, made another attempt to conquer Tibet. But instead of invading, his troops merely told the Tibetans to surrender. The Mongols were pushing into the middle east and up into what is now Russia; they controlled northern China and had put pressure on the Song Dynasty, whose capital was at Linan, modern-day Hangzhou, in southern China. The Tibetans, a fractured polity, had little choice but to cede to the Mongol request, and one of their most learned scholars, Sakya Paṇḍita, traveled to Köten's court to show submission and offer his services as a guru.

From among all the glorified tales of Mongol rule in Tibet, the subsequent relationship that developed between Sakya Paṇḍita and Köten is the most shrouded in hagiography. Just as the second Karmapa's story became the foundational myth of the reincarnation tradition, the story of the relationship between Sakya Paṇḍita and Köten became the foundational myth of the patron-recipient relationship.[45] The historical details of their relationship are difficult to extract from Tibetan records of this period, but there is no evidence of Mongol raids into Tibet during the period Sakya Paṇḍita stayed at Güyüg's court.

The situation changed in 1251, when the great *paṇḍita*—and possibly Köten[46]—died, and Güyüg's cousin Möngke took the throne. Möngke was a grandson of Chinggis Khan, the son of Chinggis's son Tolui (1192–1232). His ascension to the throne took the form of a coup, in which the Ögödei branch of the family was removed from power. Following the coup, a simmering feud developed between the Ögödei and Tolui branches of the imperial family. It would have lasting consequences for the entire Mongol Empire, and for Rangjung Dorjé.

To shore up his reign in the face of possible resistance from the Ögödei, Möngke appointed his brothers to ruling positions across the empire: he placed Qubilai in charge of northern China; Hülegü (1218–1265) in the Persian sphere of the empire called the Il-Khanate; and in accordance with Mongol custom, his youngest brother Ariq Böke stayed in his capital at Karakoram on the Mongol steppe to act as Möngke's regent while he left home on campaigns. The only large area of the vast Mongol Empire not directly under the control of Möngke's immediate family was the Qipchaq Khanate, or Golden Horde to the northwest of Mongolia, which was ruled by his uncle and ally Batu (1207–1255), and his descendants. Along with setting up this supportive infrastructure, in a footnote to his rule, within a year of his accession, Möngke had sent armies to reinvade Tibet and established direct rule there.[47]

The attack came in 1252–1253, and its outcome was inevitable. The troops only penetrated the Plateau as far as Dam, north of Lhasa on the so-called China Road, before the Tibetans capitulated. Despite his decision to invade, Möngke does

appear to have retained respect for Tibet's religiosity,[48] and this may have been because the Tolui branch of the family had a long-standing relationship with Tibetan Buddhist gurus. A teacher from Tsel Monastery, Yarlungpa Drakpa Senggé (thirteenth century), was one of the first waves of teachers at the Great Khan's court in the early thirteenth century, and as luck would have it he became the Tolui's religious teacher. Tsel's long-standing relationship with the Tolui allowed it to garner wealth and political influence, and after Qubilai Khan came to power, its main temple, Gungtang Temple, was even designated as "Emperor Qubilai's private temple."[49] The Tsel were Tsurpu's local lords, and having a district ruler with such close ties to the emperor would also have a direct impact on the Karmapas' fortunes, for good and bad as Mongol influence increased on the Plateau.

Perhaps as an outcome of this family connection, Möngke approached Tibet as a site of patronage rather than plunder. According to Mongol tradition, he understood the lands of Tibet to be a familial possession, and he assigned powerful monasteries on the Plateau to himself and his brothers: he linked himself to Drigung Monastery; the smaller monasteries of the Pakmodru lineage, including Densa Thel, the Yazang and Tangpoché, all in central Tibet, to Hülegü; another Kagyü monastery, Taklung Monastery, also north of Lhasa, to Ariq Böke; and Tsel Monastery to Qubilai. At that stage, Sakya retained its links with Köten's camp, but after a few years, when he took Sakya Paṇḍita's two young nephews Chögyel Pakpa and Chakna Dorjé (1239–1267) into his camp, this patronage passed to Qubilai. Moving the two Sakya scions into his circle not only severed the official links between the Ögödei family and Tibet; it also granted Qubilai more influence on the Plateau than any of his brothers.

It was around this time that Qubilai first contacted Karma Pakshi. Tsurpu was under the protection of Tsel Monastery and, therefore, under Qubilai's control. Qubilai would have understood the summoning of this *bagshi* to be within his rights. As Thomas Allsen showed in his study of Mongol culture, the Mongols "viewed human talent and skill as a form of booty, to be 'shared out' among the family just like land, herd animals, and material goods."[50]

The power structures on the Plateau were certainly changing in this period, but in many ways the Mongols' rule did not disrupt Tibet's already established centers of power. Rather than disempowering the local rulers, as they had in Western Xia, the Mongols implemented a superstructure of appendage governance on top of them. The leaders of these monasteries were expected to implement Mongol law, and provide Mongol princes with all the resources and human talent that they requested, but as long as they developed close relationships with the Mongols, the local rulers could continue to exercise the influence they had customarily wielded. The monasteries were already the sites at which familial and religious lineages intersected; now they

were also sites of Mongol patronage. But their fortunes were correspondingly tied to their patrons and the fortunes of changeable Mongol princes.

The civil war that ensued after Möngke's death in 1259 provides the clearest examples of this instability. Both Ariq Böke and Qubilai claimed the Great Khan's throne; Ariq Böke was based at the Mongol capital of Qara Qorum, which Karma Pakshi had visited, and Qubilai was based in northern China. Both camps had allies, but these allies were not always reliable. Ariq Böke was force to surrender to Qubilai in 1263 because one of his allies, Alghu (r. 1260–1266), switched sides and joined forces with Qubilai. Alghu was in charge of the subordinate Chagatai Khanate in Central Asia (a region that covers parts of modern-day Xinjiang, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and northern Afghanistan). The Chagatai Khanate had been established by Alghu's great-great grandfather: Chinggis Khan's second son, Chagatai (1183–1242). He was not, therefore, particularly aligned with either side of the Ögödei-Tolui tensions. But after switching his allegiance to Qubilai in 1263, Alghu then attacked the lands of a neighboring Khan, Qaidu (1230–1301). Qaidu, a grandson of Ögödei Khan, received aid from the Qipchaq Khanate, defeated Alghu, and took effective control of the Chagatai, ruling it through his proxies who were Chagatai's descendants. From this base, he continued to fight Qubilai for central-Asian supremacy. He had himself elected an alternate Great Khan at an assembly inside the Chagatai in 1266, and worked to undermine Qubilai and his allies' rule in a number of geopolitical arenas, one of which was Tibet.[51]

The Tibetans differentiated between the two factions in dependence on their geographical position: the Chagatai Khanate, in the highland territories of Central Asia, were called the "Upper Mongols," while Qubilai's Khanate, occupying the lowlands to Tibet's northeast and east, were called the "Lower Mongols." [52] Despite the threat emanating from the Chagatai in the Central-Asian highlands, Qubilai did much to establish his rule on the Plateau after his defeat of Ariq Böke. His primary surrogates for this rule were the two young nephews of Sakya Paṇḍita, with whom he established a close relationship after Karma Pakshi left his court. This relationship was so significant that after being installed as Great Khan, Qubilai appointed Chögyel Pakpa his imperial preceptor, with ostensible control over Tibet.[53] When Chögyel Pakpa returned to Tibet in 1265, he combined this role with his standing position as the abbot of Sakya Monastery and became the most powerful person on the Plateau.[54] In 1267, he used this power to appoint a loyal attendant named Śākya Zangpo (thirteenth century) to the administrative position of great lord" of Sakya. This appointment instigated the triumvirate—imperial preceptor, abbot, and great lord—that was to rule Tibet, at least in name, for the duration of the Yuan Dynasty.[55]

After Chögyel Pakpa was installed in these roles, he set about—with Mongol backing—reorganizing governance on the Plateau. The Mongol Empire defined

its rule in variant regions through the establishment of four administrative pillars: censuses, tributes, militia, and mail services. Chögyel Pakpa and the Mongols set up a mail service in central Tibet in 1267. They conducted a census shortly after in 1268, which enabled them to ascertain rates of taxation and establish sources for militia.[56] By 1270, they had also abolished the system of assigned patronage, and replaced it with a system of about thirteen myriarchs (lords of ten thousand) in central Tibet.[57] Although there have been several variant enumerations of these myriarchs, traditionally there are said to have been six each in the twin regions of Central Tibet, Ü and Tsang, and one that crossed the border between them. In western Tibet, which is considered part of Tsang, were three of the thirteen, the "three realms of Ngari": (1) Gugé, (2) Purang, and (3) Mangyül. In central Tsang, there were (4) North Latö and (5) South Latö, and either (6a) Chumik Monastery or (6b) Zhalu Monastery, depending on who was in the ascendency. Between Tsang and Ü were the lands governed from (7) Yardrok Monastery, and in Ü itself were the myriarchs of (8) Drigung Monastery, (9) Tsel Monastery, (10) Pakmodru Monastery, (11) Yazang Monastery, which Qubilai granted independence from Pakmodru, (12) Gyama Monastery, and (13) Taklung Monastery. The descriptions of Tibetan governance during this period do not usually include descriptions of eastern Tibet. Much of what later became known as Amdo and some parts of Kham, were administered by the neighboring Tufan administration.[58]

The myriarchs acted as local lords of these regions. They received their offices from the Great Khan but were responsible to the triumvirate of Sakya rulers. They were tasked with collecting taxes from and maintaining postal services in their lands. Neither Qubilai Khan nor his Great Khan descendants visited Tibet. They exercised power through the Sakya rulers, the myriarchs, the local militia if necessary, and military expeditions and occupations.

Most myriarchs were the administrative heads of powerful family-run monasteries that had preestablished allegiances with Mongol princes. The decision to establish the myriarchs was made necessary in part by the moribund state of the system of appendages following the deaths of Köten, Möngke, and later Ariq Böke. But it also represented a power play by Chögyel Pakpa and Qubilai to establish their control over the Plateau through administration rather than war. It almost worked.

WAR IN RANGJUNG DORJÉ'S NEIGHBORHOOD

Between 1265 and 1270, Chögyel Pakpa and Qubilai attempted to integrate Tibet into Qubilai's sphere of influence. The principle problem with their plan was their

lack of influence over several Tibetan myriarchs. They had a particularly fraught relationship with three local myriarchs: the lords of Drigung and Pakmodru and their ally in western Tibet, Namsa Pashi ("Hero of Heaven and Earth") who controlled most of Purang, Gugé, and Mangyül. These leaders had allegiances with other Mongol princes who were not aligned with Qubilai: first Möngke and Hülegu, and after their deaths, the Chagatai.

At first, Chögyel Pakpa attempted to negotiate with these groups. Along with a rising star at Sakya named Künga Zangpo (1220–ca.1280/81), who later became great lord of Tibet, he tried to exchange control of the Yardrok lands, which were under Sakya control even though they had their own lord, for rule of the three regions of western Tibet. During these negotiations, Künga Zangpo bribed one of Namsa Pashi's attendants to poison him. Shortly after this, the Sakya took advantage of the resultant power vacuum in western Tibet and helped established a new vassal kingdom that ruled the regions of Mangyül and Gungtang. The new king of Mangyül Gungtang was the old "prince of Khab," who was related to the Sakya hierarchs by marriage. His new kingdom included a large section of lands that had been annexed from the Chagatai-aligned myriarchs of western Tibet. The Chagatai invaded Tibet in support of them.[59]

These events not only set the general tone for politics on the Plateau in Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime—several peculiar coincidences also connect these events to Rangjung Dorjé specifically and affected the development of the reincarnation tradition. The first of these coincidences is that Rangjung Dorje was born in the contested region; some biographers state he was born in Mangyül Gungtang and others in South Latö. This may be explained by the fact that his birthplace, Ladep, was near their border.[60] He then spent his early life traveling between the two territories; his autobiographies and biographies all relay tales set in both provinces, and his teacher Orgyenpa's Bütra Hermitage was in South Latö.

The second coincidence was his teacher Orgyenpa's involvement in and recording of the Upper Mongols' invasion. Like two other biographies of Nyingma teachers, which Karl Everding notes in his 2002 study of the formation of Mangyül Gungtang, Orgyenpa's biography records a thwarted invasion by Upper Mongols in the late 1260s. It suggests that the Upper Mongols were turned back when Orgyenpa and a "large gathering of humans and non-humans" gathered on Pelmo Tang Plain and performed tantric rituals.[61] The two Nyingma biographies Everding studied state that they were turned back because of bad weather.[62]

Meanwhile, the Lower Mongols, Qubilai's armies, enjoyed a victory in southern China that would change the course of world history: they defeated the Chinese Southern Song Dynasty and established the Great Yuan Empire. Not everyone on the Plateau was happy about the Lower Mongols' success, however, or their

increasing influence in Tibet. In the 1270s, a growing group of Tibetans, including members of the Sakya hierarchy, started plotting against them with the help of the Chagatai. This set them on a collision course with Chögyel Pakpa and Qubilai, and somewhat tangentially, Orgyenpa.

Orgyenpa was a person of influence in South Latö. He had gained his name by traveling to the valley known in Tibetan as Orgyen (and in Indian languages as Oḍḍiyāna or Uḍḍiyāna), the legendary home of Padmasambhava, which is usually associated with the Swat Valley in present-day Pakistan. He then continued onto the Indian plains and experienced firsthand the holy land about which most other Tibetans had only read. Back in Tibet, he was much sought after for his religious knowledge and charisma. But he also had a reputation for speaking his truth to power. This did not endear him to many rulers.

One of the people he picked a fight with was Künga Zangpo, who at the time was accruing more and more power as great lord. Encouraged by the fraught environment on the Plateau, Künga Zangpo ruled with a combination of paranoia and brute force. He fell out with Chögyel Pakpa and his brother Chakna Dorjé, and there were even rumors he was involved in Chakna Dorjé's death in 1267. In 1275, when he heard that the monks at Bütra Hermitage were repeating the rumors about him killing Chakna Dorjé, he marshaled an army, marched south, razed Bütra, and killed some of its resident monks and yogis.[63]

Orgyenpa was not there at the time, but in response to Künga Zangpo's overreaction, and perhaps out of concern for what else might happen to people under his protection, he became firm friends with the anti–Künga Zangpo—and therefore pro–Chögyel Pakpa and Qubilai—forces in the region. It was an alliance founded on a common enemy and apparent mutual respect that became even stronger after Chögyel Pakpa's return from Qubilai's court in 1275/76. At that time, Chögyel Pakpa not only removed Künga Zangpo from his post, but he also introduced Orgyenpa to the Mongol prince Auruyci, Qubilai's seventh son and Pakpa's escort, who paid for Bütra Hermitage to be rebuilt. This created a link between Orgyenpa and Qubilai that eventually led to the Tibetan's visit to the Mongol capitals in the 1280s.[64]

Chögyel Pakpa's return was not, however, the end of Tibetan—or Sakya or Mongol—infighting on the Plateau. He was not able to stop Künga Zangpo, and may have even been killed by him in 1280. Qubilai, at least, blamed Künga Zangpo for Pakpa's death and sent a force of seventy thousand to Tibet to remove him from power. The force recruited a further thirty thousand soldiers on the way. As Everding has pointed out, the size of the expedition suggests that Qubilai was sending a message not only to his antagonists in Tibet but also to their Chagatai backers.[65] Qubilai had Künga Zangpo executed, and he left a regiment of seven thousand on the Plateau to stave off unrest.

In 1285, Drigung militia destroyed Jayül Monastery and killed its abbot, a Sakya ally. Five years later, in 1290, they were in open rebellion against Qubilai and his Sakya regents. Qubilai sent troops that razed Drigung Monastery. In desperation, the Drigung asked their Upper Mongol, Chagatai allies for help. In 1290, when Rangjung Dorjé was a child of six, they invaded Tibet for a second time. Again, they came through South Latö, meeting for a decisive battle with Qubilai's forces on the Palmo Thang Plain, the same plain on which Orgyenpa had held a prayer vigil to repel them twenty years earlier. The Lower Mongols were victorious, and displayed their victory by chopping of the Upper Mongols' and Drigung fighters' ears.[66]

The Drigung were vanquished, but not completely destroyed. After the Sakya hierarchs intervened, Qubilai allowed Drigung Monastery to be rebuilt. Qubilai did not, however, come to as easy a resolution with his cousin Qaidu. Qaidu continued to fight the Lower Mongols until his death in 1301, but his theater of war moved off the Plateau.

As Rangjung Dorjé's life story will show, the vagaries of war and the Mongol occupation of the Plateau did much to shape his experience. His early years were passed in a war zone, where, as the child of an itinerant potter, he was more vulnerable than most. He saw killings and, along with his guru Orgyenpa, was forced to flee for his safety. It is also likely that he had to move to Tsurpu Monastery as a child because of concerns for his safety.

But his experience of Mongol occupation was not all negative. In Mongol-controlled Eurasia, religions, ideas, governmental models, languages, produce, people, animals, genes, and diseases moved across the continent at unprecedented rates. This movement was so profound that the effects of these exchanges are still being felt today. Tibet was not immune to this movement. The Mongols regularly sought to import what they thought was Tibet's most valuable commodity, religious knowledge. As the knowledge was stored in people rather than books, they pressed the region's most respected religious figures, the *bagshi*, to attend on them at court. This was how Karma Pakshi had ended up at two royal, Mongol courts. The Mongols wanted knowledge of astrology, alchemy, and medicine, particularly long-life elixirs, and they believed the Tibetans possessed this knowledge and more.[67] Although it was not perhaps a primary purpose, they also learned about Buddhism, and showed a particular interest in tantric rituals with their promise of power.

In exchange for this knowledge, they granted the Tibetan gurus who instructed them power and wealth. They achieved power through their direct access to ruling families and, later, during Qubilai's reign, through the organs of governance, when in 1264 he set up the Bureau for Tibetan and Buddhist Affairs and made Chögyel Pakpa his first imperial preceptor.[68]

The transfer of wealth to the Plateau during this period was perhaps even more extraordinary and had longer-term consequences. Imperial wealth paid for new monasteries and additions to old monasteries, such as the large statues and extensions that Karma Pakshi, and later Rölpé Dorjé made to the Karmapas' monasteries and hermitages. The Tibetans were involved in the construction of temples in Mongolia and China, particularly at Wutai Shan, which became a center of Tibetan Buddhist activity. Many Tibetans were employed as performers of rituals for the court, in the capitals, at Wutai Shan, and in Tibet. Importantly for Rangjung Dorjé's story and broader Tibetan intellectual history, the Mongols also sponsored large copying and printing projects that enabled the wider distribution of Buddhist texts and consequent developments in scholarship of these texts.[69]

NETWORKS

The Tibetans had already engaged in religious, cultural, and social exchange across the Plateau, but their inclusion within the Mongol Empire intensified this movement and exchange. Perhaps one of the best examples of how the Mongol and Tibetan networks interconnected and intensified each other, and how this exchange also tangentially facilitated the development of the reincarnation traditions, is the story of Zhönnu Wangchuk (thirteenth century). Despite not being a member of the Khön family, Zhönnu Wangchuk ruled as great lord at Sakya from 1285–1288 and again in 1298. In between these two stints, he was a high-ranking official in the Bureau of Tibetan and Buddhist Affairs in Beijing. But the part of his story most relevant to understanding Rangjung Dorjé's life story and the development of the Karmapa body rosary is his ancestry. Zhönnu Wangchuk started his administrative career as the myriarch of South Latö. He received this hereditary position from his father, Masang Shakyabum, who was adopted by the previous, childless South Latö myriarch, Gangkarwa Chukpo Tripel (thirteenth century). Gangkarwa adopted Masang because the child came from his wife's family, the Shétruk. Five generations back from Masang, the Shétruk family, by coincidence, had been the most influential family in Tölung when the second Karmapa was restoring Tsurpu Monastery. His ancestor Dorjé Bar had been Karma Pakshi's patron, financing a statue of Śakyamuni Buddha at Tsurpu, and marrying Karma Pakshi's niece.[70] This means that during Rangjung Dorjé's early years in South Latö, his local lord was not only the great lord of Sakya who had previously worked for Qubilai in Dadu, he was also a descendant of Karma Pakshi's niece.

This story exemplifies the way familial, religious, and then, later, reincarnation lineages intersected in monastic institutions, and how their networks

spread out across the Plateau and on through the Mongol Empire's administration. It is unclear whether Zhönnu Wangchuk's presence had any direct impact on Rangjung Dorjé's life, but it does suggest there were close connections between Sakya's central administration, South Latö's ruling house, and Tsurpu Monastery. Orgyenpa had close links with some at Sakya, the Mongol court, and a religious connection with Karma Pakshi. Rangjung Dorjé was brought into this network when Orgyenpa recognized him as Karma Pakshi's rebirth. By this act, he had created connections for the five-year-old child from Latö to the Mongolian capitals. These connections were based on geographic, familial, political, and religious connections, and they all impacted the Karmapa body rosary's acceptance and survival.

It was also these families, communities, and networks that supported—and sometimes thwarted—the reincarnation tradition as it developed, and it continues to depend on these networks for support today.

NOTES

1. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 30.4–5; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 277.1–3. This song's colophon notes that he performed it when he first arrived at Karma Monastery.

2. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 393; *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 67.2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 235–238.4.

3. Karma Pakshi describes himself as Dus gsum mkhyen pa's emanation (*dus gsum mkhyen pa'i rnam par 'phrul*) in *Karma Pak shi'i bka' 'bum*, 11.3.

4. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 414.

5. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar*, 358–374.

6. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 377.

7. Rang byung rdo rje provides lists of his previous lives in his *Liberation Story in Verse* and in one of his songs. Rang *byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 376–378; *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 23–24; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 203–204.

8. There is one exception to this. In the *Sngar skye rnam thar*, Rang byung rdo rje says he learned how to send forth emanations when he was Rgyal mchog dbyang and practiced Hayagrīva yogas with Padmasambhava, but he then claims to have forgotten this skill: *Sngar pa'i skye bor rnam thar*, 356. Furthermore, it describes an ability he developed in that lifetime rather than describing how his body of any lifetime was produced.

9. Ye shes rgyal mtshan, *'Gro mgon chos rgyal 'phags pa'i rnam thar*, vol. 1 of *Lam 'bras slob bshad* (Dehradun, India: Sakya Centre). This text describes him as an emanation of Vairocana, 367.1, and as a rebirth of Sa ston ri pa, 369.1–3.

10. Nyi ma seng ge, *Zhi byed brgyud pa phyi ma'i chos bla ma byang chub sems dpa'kun dga'i lugs*, in *Zhi byed snga bar phyi gsum gyi skor* (Thimpu, Bhutan: Druk Sherik Parkhang, 1979), 4:401–419. I was alerted to this claim by Cabezón, "On Tulku Lineages," 4.

11. Kun dga' 'od zer was also known as Kun dga' bzang po. To avoid confusion between this person and O rgyan pa's enemy, the Sa skya Dpon chen, Kun dga' bzang po, I will call him Kun dga' 'od zer in this book.

12. As Melvyn Goldstein, has noted, this belief came to underpin the transfer of estates in Tibet. He writes: "When reincarnation is used as a principle of succession, legitimization of the individual selected as the incarnation is of critical importance to the successful operation of the system. In other words, the selection mechanism must eliminate doubts as to whether the person chosen is the "real" incarnation": Goldstein, "The Circulation of Estates in Tibet," in *The Tibetan History Reader,* ed. Kurtis Schaeffer and Gray Tuttle (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 479.

13. Cabezón explains that these children were recognized by at least one of three ways: they (1) declared themselves a reincarnation; (2) were identified by a teacher; or (3) were identified by former students who built a consensus: "On Tulku Lineages," 6–7. In these early cases, all three of these sources of authority were needed.

14. Dgyer sgom, also Dgyer gzhon nu grags pa. See Las chen kun dga' rgyal mtshan, *Bka' gdams chos 'byung gsal ba'i sgron me* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2003), 247. Daniel Berounský has written about this recognition and notes that another man from the same monastery, Tshul khrims mgon po (1291–1363/65), was also called a *sprul ba* but that this description was given to him slightly after Rang byung rdo rje's recognition and it was not clear whose *sprul ba* he was: Berounský, "Entering Dead Bodies, Part 1," 17.

15. Cabezón notes this reference in "On Tulku Lineages," 13 (and its source, Gos lo, *Deb sngon*, vol. *ka*, 30b).

16. Shes rab 'byung gnas. *Chos rje 'jig rten mgon po'i rnam thar rdo rje rin po che 'bar ba* (Shang khang [Hong Kong], China: Shang kang then mā dpe skrun khang, 2006), 1–2, 6–7. Cabezón also noted this story of manifestation: "On Tulku Lineages," 4–5.

17. *Karma Pak shi'i bka' 'bum*, 89:7.

18. O rgyan pa's student Bsod nams 'od zer (fourteenth century) describes the recognition of this child by his teacher O rgyan pa in *Grub chen O rgyan pa'i rnam par thar pa byin brlabs kyi chu rgyun*, 202–203. According to Brenda Li this work was composed shortly after O rgyan pa's death in the mid-fourteenth century: "A Critical Study of the Life of the 13th-Century Tibetan Mmonk U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal Based on His Biographies" (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 2011), 12–18, 70. The use of the three terms *sprul ba'i sku, sku'i skye ba,* and *sprul ba* in this story shows how they were easily aligned. In the passages that describe O gyan pa's recognition of Kun dga' bzang po, for example, the three terms could be read as synonyms, and the passage would simply suggest that O gyan pa traveled to Nyé mdo Monastery, where he met the young *sprul ba'i sku* or *sku'i skye ba* of his teacher. But the passage could also be read to suggest that as O gyan pa's teacher Go tsang pa was a *sprul ba'i sku,* his rebirth—or *sku'i skye ba*—must be a *sprul ba'i sku*. This is a different point.

19. This story is told in Bsod nams 'od zer, *O rgyan pa'i rnam thar*, 197–200.

20. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 220

21. Tib. *'Bras spung mchod rten*. Some of the original Amarāvatī *stūpa* is now in the British Museum in London. Rang byung rdo rje includes a description of the Mtshur phu copy of this Indian construction in his poem *Mtshur phu'i bstod pa dam pa gnas kyi tshul gsal bar byed pa snyan ngag rgyan kyi me tog ba'i sgron me*, in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum, ca*:39

22. Rgwa Lo tsā ba, *Ser gling*, 74.

23. Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 35.

24. This statue survived until the twentieth century, when it was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. The seventeenth Karmapa rebuilt it in accordance with elderly monks' memories.

25. Karma Pak shi, *Grub chen karma pak shi'i rang rnam lha chen 'dzam gling rgyan bzhengs pa'i skor*, in *Karma Pak shi'i bka' 'bum*, 21–36; Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 35.

26. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 377.

27. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 377. Tib. *zhwa nag cod pan 'dzin pa gsum pa*.

28. Jackson explains the black-hat tradition in *Patron and* Painter, 38–61.

29. Jackson, *Patron and Painter*, 47–53.

30. Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, 1–20.

31. Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, 2.

32. Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, 57–58.

33. Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, 21–40.

34. Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, 35; Valentine, "The Lords of the Northern Treasures," 32.

35. This version of Khri Srong btsan sgam po's story was made famous by the *Maṇi Bka' 'bum*. See Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Maṇi Bka'-'bum*," 82.

36. In the texts of the treasure tradition, the story of Khri Srong lde btsan has most often been told from the perspective of the *tāntrika* he invited to Tibet, who was said to have become his teacher: Padmasambhava. Janet Gyatso, "The *Gter ma* Literature," 156.

37. The stories differ, however, on how fast the empire declined. Traditional histories describe a collapse. See, for example, Nor brang o rgyan, *Bod sil bu'i byung ba brjod pa shel dkar 'phreng* ba (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1991). Contemporary historians suggest a more gradual disintegration of the empire: see Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 61–72; van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, 45–50; and Dalton, *The Taming of Demons:* 44–76).

38. Tib. *Snyigs ma'i dus*.

39. Brandon Dotson, "Theorising the King: Implicit and Explicit Sources for the Study of Tibetan Sacred Kingship," *Revue d'etudes tibétaines* 21 (2011): 83–103.

40. The writing of the fourteenth-century Tibetan ruler Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302–1364) provides an interesting insight into the ambivalent relationship between Tibetan and Mongol rulers during the Mongol Empire: see Ruth Gamble and Yangmotso, "Servant-Like Lords and Heavenly Kings: Jangchub Gyeltsen and the 5th Dalai Lama on Governance and Kingship," *Cahiers d'Extême-Asie* 24 (2016): 145–167. But later, the apotheosis of the emperors saw them transformed into bodhisattvas like the early Tibetan emperors. The emperors of the East, whether Mongol, Manchu, or Chinese, were associated with Mañjuśrī, and the Mongol rulers who returned to the steppe came to be associated with Vajrapāni. See Patricia Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 184. The emperor whom Rangjung Dorjé has the most to do with, Toghon Temür, was later incorporated into the Tai Situpa body rosary. See Karma gzhan pan rgya mtsho, *Kam tshang bla ma yab sras drug gi rnam thar* (Xining, Tibet: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe sgrun khang, 2008), 90–98.

41. Tenzin Choephak Ringpapontsang discusses the relationship between Chos rgyal 'phags pa and Qubilai Khan and how they understood merit: "Conquering the Conqueror: Reassessing the Relationship between Qubilai Khan and 'Phags pa Lama" (PhD diss. Australian National University, 2016).

42. Elliot Sperling investigated the relationships between the Tibetans, the Mongols, and the Tanguts in some detail: "Hülegü and Tibet," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungarica*, 44, nos. 1–2 (1990): 145–157; "rTsa-mi lo-tsa-ba Sangs-rgyas grags-pa and the Tangut Background to Early Mongol-Tibetan Relations," *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes*, ed. Per Kværne (Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1992), 801–824; "Further Remarks Apropos of the 'Ba'-rom-pa and the Tanguts," *Acta Orientalia* 57, no. 1 (2004): 1–26; and "Karma Rol-pa'i rdo-Rje and the Re-Establishment of Karma-pa Political Influence in the 14th Century," in

Tibet after Empire: Culture, Society, and Religion between 850–1000, ed. Cristoph Cüppers, Rob Mayer, and Michael Walter (Lumbini, Nepal: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2004), 229–244.

43. Rang byung rdo rje visited the subjugated Western Xia kingdom on his journeys to and from the Mongol court: *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 410.

44. Turrel Wylie mentions this story in "The First Mongol Conquest of Tibet Reinterpreted," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37, no. 1 (1977): 103–133.

45. Given the importance of this relationship to Tibetan history, there have been many studies of it over the years. See, for example, David Seyfort Ruegg, "*Mchod yon, Yon mchod* and *Mchod gnas/Yon gnas*: On the Historiography and Semantics of a Tibetan Religio-Social and Religio-Political Concept," in *Tibetan History and Language: Studies Dedicated to Uray Geza on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ernst Steinkellner (Vienna: Arbetskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1991).

46. For doubts about Köten's death dates, see Anna Tsendina, "Godan Khan in Mongolian and Tibetan Historical Works," *Studia Orientalia* 85 (1999): 245–248.

47. Luciano Petech, "The Establishment of the Yuan-Sa-skya Partnership," in *The History of Tibet: The Medieval Period: c. 850–1895*, ed. Alex McKay (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 2:342.

48. Kapstein describes this Mongol perspective on Tibetans by quoting from Rnying ma visitors to the Mongol court: *The Tibetans*, 113–114.

49. Sørensen, Hazod, and Gyalpo, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain*, 47.

50. Thomas Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 210.

51. Karl-Heinz Everding, "The Mongol States and Their Struggle for Dominance over Tibet in the 13th Century," in *Tibet, Past and Present: Tibetan Studies I,* eds. Henk Blezer and Abel Zadoks (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002), 112–114.

52. Everding, "The Mongol States," 112, and Sperling, "Hülegü and Tibet," 153–156. These writers each point out that the term *stod hor* was used to refer to both the Chagatai Khanate and Hülegü's Il-Khanate, which was centered on the Iranian Plateau. But Hülegü's death and the region's conversion to Islam in 1295 meant it was unlikely that the Il-Khanate Mongols interfered in Tibetan affairs in any substantial way after this. Therefore, when the Tibetans of this period talk about the Upper Mongols, they are primarily referring to the Chagatai.

53. Ch. *Di shi*, transliterated in Tibetan as *ta shri* and *ta'i shri*.

54. The term for Sa skya's abbot in Tibetan was *gdan sa chen po*: see Luciano Petech, "The Mongol Census in Tibet," in *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richards*, ed. Micheal Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 1980), 184–185; and Everding, "The Mongol States," 112.

55. Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, 114; and Petech, "The Mongol Census in Tibet," 186–187.

56. Petech, "The Mongol Census in Tibet," 1–2, 4.

57. Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yüan-Sa-skya Period of Tibetan History* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990), 16. *Khri dpon* is the Tibetan equivalent to the Mongolian word *tumen*, which means "lord of ten thousand." The Tibetan rulers did not rule ten thousand households, but they still had the name. Occasionally more than thirteen myriarchs are listed for Tibet: see Petech, "The Mongol Census in Tibet," 35.

58. Luciano Petech, "Tibetan Relations with Sung China and with the Mongols,", *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Centuries*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 192.

59. Everding, "The Mongol States," 116–117.

60. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar*, 366.

61. Li, "U rgyan pa's Biographies," 286.

62. Everding, "The Mongol States," 116–118

63. This hermitage was located on a hill near the present-day town of Gnya' lam.

64. Li, "U rgyan pa's Biographies," 291–297. The link also led to O rgyan pa receiving an invitation to the "Dharma Council of Chu mig" (*chu mig chos 'khor*). This meeting was billed as a congregation of all the leading religious leaders of the time, but as Petech has explained, "in all likelihood . . . it had political consequences, such as the final recognition of Mongol (which is to say, Qubilai's) paramountcy": *Central Tibet and the Mongols*, 24.

65. Everding, "The Mongol States," 122.

66. Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, 81.

67. Christopher Beckwith wrote, "Of all the religious teachers that they met, only the Tibetan Buddhists (and to a minor degree the less numerous Kashmiri Buddhists) were skilled in the one thing that the Mongols traditionally demanded of their qam: astrology . . . In addition to the fields of medicine and astrology, the Tibetan *bakhshis* were skilled in alchemy": Beckwith, "Tibetan Science at the Court of the Great Khans," *Journal of the Tibet Society* 7 (1987): 7–8.

68. Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols*, 22.

69. One of oldest extant printed texts is from Paṇ chen 'Jigs med grags pa (1375–1451). It has pagination in Tibetan and Chinese, and its colophon says Orgyenpa organized for a print of the *Kalacakra Tantra* in the Mongolian capitals after Qubilai's death in 1294. See Leonard van der Kuijp, "The Kalacakra and the Patronage of Tibetan Buddhism by the Mongol Imperial Family," in *The Central Eurasian Studies Lectures, Lecture 4*, ed. Federica Venturi (Bloomington: Department of Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University, 2004).

70. This story is outlined in a text called the *Shel dkar chos 'byung*, which has been translated and analyzed in Wangdu, Diemberger, and Hazod, *Shel Dkar Chos 'Byung: History of the "White Crystal."* This story is on pages 12–13.

4

Landscapes

When the rains of preconceptions cease, you won't mind it pouring outside.
When you realize *saṃsāra* is a cliff, you won't mind rugged chasms outside.
When there are no more thorns of hate, you won't mind pointed barbs.
When the streams of craving dry up, you won't mind churning rivers.
When the peaks of pride are leveled, you won't mind the high mountains outside.

Rangjung Dorjé,
aged twenty-nine, 1312, Trashi Jong, New Tsari.[1]

The Tölung Valley, to the northwest of Lhasa, has fertile soil for agriculture and marks the beginning of the China Road, the main route north from Lhasa to northern China. But despite the region's agriculture, trade, and politics it is rare to find a reference to it that does not locate it by referencing its most famous inhabitants, the Karmapas of Tsurpu Monastery. The first Karmapa's students may have worried that Tsurpu was too far from the road to attract support, but as the reincarnation tradition developed, the region's religious, social, and economic life shifted focus from the road, up the valley, to the monastery.

In the Tölung Valley, as elsewhere across the Tibetan Plateau, sites like Tsurpu that are associated with reincarnation lineages have come to carry greater significance than their physical, political, or economic geographies would suggest, and these sites, in turn, have played a principal role in the preservation of reincarnation lineages. These are the places in which the lineages have been performed

and memorialized; these are the places to which subsequent members of reincarnation lineages have returned, and in which their narratives have unfolded. The communities and the social and religious networks that have continued the reincarnation traditions are positioned in these places. These places have been—and are still—intrinsic to Tibet's reincarnation system.

The body rosaries' legacies in these sites consist not only of the buildings, statues, and treasure they accumulated, but also the memories of their activities, the ceremonies they performed, the literature they composed. In many cases, the monasteries, hermitages, mountains, forests, and other locations merely acted as the settings for these events. But at other times, the performers, composers, and history makers directed their audiences' gaze onto the sites and valorized them. These sites became the subject of literature and ritual, and were transformed by architecture and landscaping. For the people who have engaged with these places over the centuries, the sites have also become the depositories of personal memories, narratives, and symbolic transformations that have defined their identities and social relations.

Moreover, like communities, texts, and lineages, these sites existed in space and, therefore, form parts of a multiple and related cultural geography. Communities have created roads, trade routes, and also boundaries, borders, and walls between these and other locations of symbolic significance. They have conceptualized multiple, interlinked sites, and mapped their experiences onto the physical world. These transformations were occasionally aided by various rulers and governments, but they were not always the sole or even primary actors in these activities.[2] Places of symbolic significance are not always those that have political, militaristic, economic, or even social significance. Conceptions of space motivated by these various interests intersect and diverge.

Sometimes landscaping motivated by symbolism has included the physical alteration of a site by the creation of a built environment. At other times, sites have been transformed through symbolism alone. Visitors and inhabitants have absorbed the literature and rituals that asked them to look at locations in new ways, and once these symbolic visions were seen, they were rarely unseen.[3]

The collective visions of these places did, however, continue to evolve. Like the literary, artistic, and ritualistic genres in which their meaning was articulated, communal relationships with these sites were constantly amended. Cultural geographies are, as the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan asserts, "a collage of geography, memory, and sentiment, welded together and burnished by art and ideology." [4] If any of their many components change, they change too. The introduction of reincarnation lineages was an example of an adjustable part. It transformed Tibet's cultural geography.

Although understood primarily as spatial phenomena, these spaces have history too—multiple, complex, related back stories. By Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime,

societies had been transforming Tibet's cultural landscape for millennia. Some elements of their environment had remained relatively constant: the region's physical geography, for example, and the yearly patterns of seasons and harvests had mostly kept their basic patterns. Other elements of their surroundings had experienced more rapid change. Political, social, religious, and economic developments had all left physical and conceptual residues in the created spaces in which the early Karmapas lived their lives.

But unlike the forces of narrative and logic, which tended to obscure, bury, or attack alternate perspectives, the region's cultural geographies enabled complexity, opposition, and disruption. Otherwise disconnected or opposing phenomena that would be discordant in art, narrative, ritual, or argument can be easily connected by proximity. As Doreen Massey explains, "Places, rather than being locations of coherence, become the foci of the meeting and the non-meeting of the previously unrelated and (are) thus integral to the generation of novelty."[5]

The tradition of reincarnation lineages developed interdependently with Tibet's often discordant cultural geographies and relied on the connections that places can make to sustain them. In the Karmapas' reincarnation tradition, coherence through place has worked in a variety of ways. To begin with, the sites associated with the Karmapas have become some of the traditions' longest-lived attributes. Kampo Nénang, Karma, and Tsurpu Monasteries all existed before the name "Karmapa," before the Karmapas' stories and images were being reproduced, and may even be older than the black hat.[6] These monasteries memorialized the Karmapas and created space for them in the region's cultural landscape. Furthermore, by sharing these same memorials, the Karmapas created another link between them, one that allowed for bodily, personality, and temporal divergences.

Düsum Khyenpa's biographers, particularly those who wrote descriptions of his death, insist that he wished to maintain Tsurpu as an isolated site for yoga practice and monasticism. Karma Pakshi's redevelopments were much grander and made Tsurpu a magnet for local pilgrims. Rangjung Dorjé's interactions with Tsurpu, the Karmapas' other monasteries, and the several hermitages that he founded probably had less impact on them physically than Karma Pakshi's developments, but his conceptual remodeling of them has endured longer. It was Rangjung Dorjé who created the lasting abstract links between the Karmapa body rosary and these sites. These were the places, he repeatedly wrote, in which the Karmapas lived, the sacred sites to which these sacred beings would return.

Rangjung Dorjé's efforts to insert the Karmapas into Tibet's cultural landscape even seem to have been—at least partly—conscious.[7] In several places within his writing, particularly in his poetic compositions, he explicitly states that he is trying to change the way that his audience views the Karmapas' abodes and the places

they visit. Sometimes he explains that he is doing this to encourage insights in his students, and in these cases the environment becomes a focus of their meditation, a soteriological tool. But at other times, he writes of his intention to coat the places about which he is writing with a layer of poetic prestige. Along with these conceptual remodeling projects, he also writes the Karmapas into the stories of other, venerated sites, suggesting a place for them in the larger histories of places like Lhasa's Jokhang Temple and the sacred mountains of Tsari and Khawa Karpo. Furthermore, he contrasts these sites of symbolic significance, which have been defined and supported by religious culture, with the secular places of families, politics, and war. In his writing, this means sites like the Mongol capitals of Dadu and Xanadu are presented as the antitheses of sacred sites, places whose luxuries should be shunned and feared.

POETRY IN PLACE

These attempts to change his audiences' environmental perceptions are no doubt aided by the two genres in which he wrote most about place: praises and songs. Unlike Tibet's historical and biographical traditions, both of these genres regularly include detailed descriptions of their subjects and themes.[8] And as environmental imagery is more likely contained in descriptions than narratives, Rangjung Dorjé's writing in these genres tends to provide more details of his cultural geography than does his writing in other literary forms. As these are two of Tibet's oldest literary and performative genres and they have always contained environmental descriptions, their heritage also makes it possible to place Rangjung Dorjé's compositions within Tibet's larger continuum of cultural geography, and examine how he created space for the Karmapas within it.

The oldest extant Tibetan praises are those found in the Dunhuang documents; some of them are independent works, and others are passages or verses in larger works like ritual texts.[9] Most of these praises are directed toward deities and gurus. Praises to people and gurus are also common in writing associated with the second diffusion of Buddhism and the treasure tradition, along with many praises to lineages. The praises from all these eras and traditions have much in common; they describe the object of praise with effusive language and imagery and include a section in which the praise composer or reciter pays homage to him, her, or it. The descriptions of these objects usually include at least one reference to their abode, and sometimes a description of it.

Rangjung Dorjé's praises directed to places are, however, uncommon. Neither the *Collected Works* of his two predecessor Karmapas nor those of his other

primary lineal forebears contain similar praises to places. But five out of the nine praises in his *Collected Works* are directed at locations: two are to Tsurpu; one to the hermitage he founded near Tsurpu, Déchen Teng; another to the sacred mountain Khawa Karpo; and the last to an unnamed mountain valley.[10] Unlike his and others' praises to deities, buddhas, gurus, and lineages, the purpose of these praises is not merely to celebrate the object's good qualities. It is also, to use Rangjung Dorjé's words, to make his audience "look again" at these sites and "encourage their admiration."[11]

The other notable element of Rangjung Dorjé's praises to place is their reliance on the Indian *kāvya* tradition. During Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime, the Tibetan adaptation of *kāvya* was primarily a project of scholars from the Sakya tradition. Sakya Paṇḍita's promotion of Indian poetics was well-known, and members of his lineage received extensive training in it. It was not until centuries later, however, that it became widely used within Kagyü lineages.[12] During Rangjung Dorjé's time, the members of his lineage were much more renowned for their songs, which, following Milarépa's lead, used simpler meters and metaphors than compositions influenced by *kāvya*. Yet, especially in his praises and also the *Birth Stories of the Teacher*, Rangjung Dorjé employed many *kāvya* techniques.

The use of these techniques evokes an Indic geography and cosmography within these works. This vision is geographically concordant in the *Birth Stories of the Teacher*, which are mostly set in India, but in the praises to Tibetan sites, it is somewhat disorientating. In these works, native Tibetan imagery of flowered meadows and snowy peaks compete with lotus ponds and elephants, and the results are images of hyper-real places that resemble some of his visions.

The influence of Indian imagery is less evident in the two compendia of songs in his *Collected Works*.[13] Most of the 137 songs in these collections are organized chronologically: the first was composed when he was a young teen at Tsurpu Monastery; the last was composed in Xanadu in the year that he died. Many of the songs are followed by colophons that explain when and where they were performed or, in a couple of exceptional cases, where they were written. Both the colophons and details within them suggest that the vast majority of the songs were performed and that they were sung rather than recited. But the texts do not describe the tunes to which they were sung.[14]

Rangjung Dorjé calls the compositions he wrote *glu* and those who wrote his colophons use the honorific *mgur* to describe them. These were the same names that had been used to describe songs written and performed by his lineal predecessors, and particularly Milarépa. Milarépa's songs—and the compositions of later yogis that followed his lead—combined two song-singing traditions: of indigenous Tibetans and of the Indian *siddha*s. The Tibetan yogis adapted rather than adopted

the *siddhas*' model. Like their lineal forebears, they too focused on *mahāmudrā* and the nondual nature of mind in their songs, but the song-singing context and content also perpetuated many formal and performative aspects of the Tibetan tradition.

The earliest extant text that represents the Tibetan indigenous song-singing tradition is the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. Within this text, the honorific designator *mgur* is reserved for royalty, and those sung by nonroyals are called *glu*. The earliest of these songs were probably composed before the *Chronicle* itself, at some stage during the sixth or seventh century.[15] The earliest songs from the Milarépa tradition are dated to his lifetime in the eleventh century, about five hundred years later. The fact that they use the same names to describe both types of songs is quite extraordinary, and even though there are many differences in content and form between the songs, they also have much in common.[16] There is evidence in many of the songs from both eras that they were sung at social events, large and small, for example, and that they often marked these occasions. They are mostly composed using simple forms, short lines, everyday language, and repetition, and they reflect the social and environmental surroundings of their performances by including localized social criticism and environmental imagery.[17]

These commonalities suggest that when yogis sang songs they called *glu* and *mgur*, they were tapping into an old and naturalized Tibetan tradition of song singing, and in this tradition, they were encouraged to sing about their surroundings. Furthermore, an analysis of their environmental imagery indicates that their located-ness enabled them to make connections between the multiple—and sometimes discordant—historical layers of their cultural geographies, indigenous and imported, in ways other forms of literature could not.

These historical layers are not only present but thematic in Rangjung Dorjé's songs. They describe Tibet's snow mountains, streams, and fields; they evoke its long-lived local gods; and they locate the stories of his heroes the dharma kings, Padmasambhava and Milarépa. They also deconstruct these same sites using *mahāmudra*'s nondual view, and help to reimagine them as the *maṇḍala*s of new-tantra deities. What is more, both in these songs and in his praises to places, Rangjung Dorjé sings and writes the Karmapas into the landscape. He finds space for them in each layer of geographic history that he excavates and re-performs, and in so doing he naturalizes their presence in Tibet's cultural landscape.

LAND OF SNOWS AND MOUNTAIN GODS

The oldest elements of his cultural geography that Rangjung Dorjé's poetry evokes are the simple signifiers that indicate his physical surrounds: valleys (*klungs*),

meadows (*spangs*), plains (*thang*), rivers (*chu* and *gtsang po*), lakes (*mtsho*), the sky (*mkha'*), earth (*sa*), rocks (*rdo*), trees (*shing*), grass (*rtswa*), and mountains (*ri*), lots of mountains: snowy mountains (*gangs ri*), rocky mountains (*brag ri*), small mountains (*ri rkang*), divine mountains (*lha ri*).

His writing also conjures the more human-scaled, survival-focused patterns of agriculture and husbandry that had defined life on the Tibetan Plateau from prehistoric times, were still predominate in Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime, and are only changing substantially now. It describes the agricultural settlements on alluvial soil in narrow river valleys wedged between mountains, and the husbandry-centered existence of other communities on the high-altitude plains that could not support agriculture. And it evokes the ever-present peaks of the region's high altitude, uninhabitable snow mountains. It also reflects the spatial conceptions that developed in dependence on this geography. In reflects, for example, the Tibetans' view that the river valleys were the "centers" (*dbus*) of livelihood, while the outlying plains and mountains were the "borderlands" (*mtha'*).[18]

Some borderlands were inhabited by enemies; others—particularly those that humans did not occupy, like mountains and lakes—were considered the abodes of even more powerful "others," the region's influential nonhuman denizens. Like humans, these spirits were ranked socially. Sometimes, this status depended on the environmental character of their abodes. Dangerous geographical features like glaciers, flood paths, and the sites of landslides marked the dwellings of malevolent spirits. Those with inspiring aspects, like sheer mountain faces or vivid blue waters, were the homes (or manifestations) of great gods. Divine abodes near centers of power, like the river-valley homes of dominant households, were especially venerated. From early times, these families understood themselves to have a particular relationship with the mountains that hovered over their valleys, and sometimes even believed their leaders to be descendants of the mountain gods.[19]

Much of this indigenous cultural geography that is reflected in Rangjung Dorjé's writing is already outlined in the *Chronicle*. In its lines, Tibet is praised for its altitudinal uniqueness. It is, the text reads, "unlike and dissimilar to the domains of men; the lands are high, the earth is pure."[20] Rulers boast that their rivers are longer and their mountains higher than their opponents' geographical features. They travel between settlements on horses, and comment on the yaks and other animals they see.[21] Those who rule central, river-valley regions wage war against the people of the borderlands, and they project the center and edges model onto the wider world. One king, Tri Détsuktsen (r. 712–755), who defeated the Chinese in battle, is praised for "putting Tibet at the center."[22]

As the last chapters have shown, Rangjung Dorjé's connection with the empire was filtered through the reimaginings of the treasure tradition, but the

environmental imagery in the *Chronicle*, the treasure tradition, and his writing is remarkably consistent. Like the *Chronicle*, his songs are replete with images of snow mountains, flowering meadows, rivers, lakes, narrow paths, horses, and harvests. Tibet's altitudinal specialness as "the Land of Snows" is still a common theme, as are the "cool waters" of its rivers and the height of its various types of mountains.

His writing also includes stories about and descriptions of the same mountain deities that appear in the *Chronicle*. The two of these mountains he mentions most frequently are Nyenchen Tanglha and Jomo Gangkar, which are linked with two eponymous mountains, Mount Nyenchen Tanglha (elevation 7,162 meters) and Mount Jomo Gangkar (elevation 7,048 meters) that rise in the Nyenchen Tanglha mountain range west of Tsurpu Monastery. Nyenchen Thanghla, at the northern edge of the range, acted as a border marker for the early Tibetan Kingdom and came to be seen as the royal family's northern guardian. Jomo Gangkar, at the southern end of the range, became known as one of Nyenchen Tanghla's consorts. Rangjung Dorjé presents these two ex-guardians of empire as his nonhuman bodyguard, repeatedly reporting on visions in which they show him deference, welcome him to their domains, and offer him their protection and support for his activities.[23]

His relationship with another of the *Chronicle*'s mountain gods, Yarlha Shampo (elevation 6,636 meters), which sits at the head of the Yarlung Valley, is different. According to legend, this mountain is the ancestor of Tibet's kings, and within the *Chronicle*'s songs, it often acts as their proxy. In describing a fight between the Yarlung Valley kings and a group that lived near Nyenchen Tanglha, for example, a *Chronicle* song reports that (from Brandon Dotson's translation):

> [Nyenchen] Thangla's peak was severed, and
> [Its soils] placed at Shampo's foot for plowing![24]

Like the *Chronicle*'s narrative, Rangjung Dorjé pays much more respect to Yarlung Shampo than to the mountains of the Nyenchen Tanglha range. This mountain spirit does not travel to meet him; rather, he travels to pay his respects to it, treating it as a source of inspiration, guidance, and physical healing.[25]

LANDSCAPES OF KINGS AND DEMON TAMERS

The influence of the treasure tradition on Rangjung Dorjé's perception of places means that the three dharma kings and Padmasambhava play prominent roles

within them too. By Rangjung Dorjé's time, these stories had been inscribed onto Tibet's cultural landscape not only figuratively but also physically through inscriptions in temples, murals, and other images.

The stories of the three kings that Rangjung Dorjé evokes are most often associated with buildings and statues; he visits the temples they built, repeatedly praises their achievements, and frames these achievements within their emanation narratives. The *Lamp That Illuminates the Flower of Poetic Decoration: A Praise to Tsurpu* exemplifies his approach to them. The work asks the audience to look out from the hill behind Tsurpu toward Lhasa and imagine it in its imperial splendor:

> See the Great King's [Tri Songtsen Gampo's] personal statue of
> The naturally formed figure of the greatest of gods, the inspirational
> Avalokiteśvara, the deity of which he is a manifestation;
> Yes, [like this statue] he too is the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.
> See clearly the naturally formed palace over which this king,
> This manifestation of Avalokiteśvara presided.
> Look again and see that mountain on which Mañjuśrī's
> Manifestation, the Great King [Tri Song Détsen] stayed.
> Look again and see that naturally formed palace upon which
> Vajrapāṇi's manifestation, Tri Relpachen, gazed.[26]

As an inheritor of a developed form of the treasure tradition, however, and a charismatic Buddhist teacher himself, Rangjung Dorjé has much more to say about Tri Song Détsen's guru, Padmasambhava, than he does about the kings. Indeed, with the possible exception of Milarépa's story and songs, the Padmasambhava legend had a more evident influence on Rangjung Dorjé's presentation of his environment than did any other source.

The environmental imagery in the Padmasambhava story is derived from a larger group of contest and subjugation stories that came to prominence after the empire's fall. This was the period in which the elite practices of imperial Buddhism were introduced to local communities across the Plateau. To communicate with locals whose belief structures were based on resident spirits, Buddhists emphasized themes and narratives common to both sets of beliefs. The most effective of these were the contest and subjugation narratives.

Contest and subjugation narratives had been part of the greater Indian religious tradition for millennia. The gods of the Vedas were outsmarted, outshone, and outfought by the gods of the Purāṇas (or "Ancient Tales"), and the main Purāṇic-era gods were later pitted against each other.[27] These stories were then adapted for the various stages of Buddhist doctrinal and ritual development, and many of

them were introduced to the Tibetans, who translated texts written in all these historical eras. Within the Tibetan canon, there are stories of Buddhists defeating non-Buddhists, Mahāyāna adherents defeating Hīnayāna adherents, Vajrayāna adherents defeating Mahāyāna adherents, and new-tantra practitioners defeating practitioners of early forms of Vajrayāna.[28]

These narratives were important to Buddhist cultural geographies because although many of them focused on their protagonists' charisma and the power of their persuasive logic, they also included environmental transformations. Mahāyāna Buddhist conversion narratives, in particular, included two often-overlapping environmental concepts: the maṇḍala and the pure land. In its most basic form, the first of these, a maṇḍala, is a diagram with peripheral circular and square borders that create a focus point at its center, which is said to represent the abode of a deity. In India, *maṇḍala*s are common in both non-Buddhist and Buddhist traditions and used in a variety of contexts: from symbols carved in the dirt outside of huts as part of early morning prayers to the construction of large temple complexes. In Tibet, they are most commonly visualized in meditation practices, but some temples and sacred sites, which are deemed to be the homes of deities, are also often represented as *maṇḍala*s.[29] The Tibetans translated the term *maṇḍala* with a word that means "center and periphery" (*dkyil 'khor*), and the concept resonated with older ideas of "centers and borders."

Buddhist pure lands are often represented as *maṇḍala*s too, but they have other, more specific qualities. They were first described primarily in discourses on buddhas' merits. In these discussions, it was claimed that each buddha within the Mahāyāna pantheon has his or her own pure land, which is a projection of his or her qualities. Later, a plethora of texts developed that were focused on the soteriological potential of these pure lands. If a being was reborn into one of these pure lands, these texts claimed, they were guaranteed to awaken in that lifetime. As a result of these claims, many Mahāyāna Buddhist practices developed that focused on being reborn in these pure lands, and some temples and other sites either came to represent them or be understood as a kind of portal to them.

Along with their centripetal tendencies, these two ideas shared another characteristic that made them useful to the Tibetans' adaptation of the Buddhist narrative: the idea that a realized being could transform the environment in which he or she lives through the sheer magnificence of their presence. This transformation, in turn, was believed to bring understanding to the region's peoples: first through the deliverance of a peaceful environment, and ultimately—when the inhabitants' perception aligned with that of the regions' buddhas and bodhisattvas—by helping to produce awakening.[30] This transformation is brought about peacefully, and those being transformed are willing participants. Not all the

beings in these stories of communal transformation are, however, as accommodating of this change, and, therefore, the Buddhist tradition, like the other Indian traditions, developed stories of more aggressive transformations.

Within Tibetan Buddhism, these stories of subjugation and change are most often associated with tantric practices; they describe Vajrayāna rather than mainstream Mahāyāna transformations. The Vajrayāna stories of subjugation and transformation begin with the same logical arguments and displays of magnificence as the general Mahāyāna stories, but they have a backup plan. If magnificence does not work, the Vajrayāna protagonist often becomes wrathful, employing the "skillful means" of violent subjugation.[31]

The Indian Vajrayāna tradition contains numerous violent subjugation narratives, but as several previous studies have pointed out, the first to grip the Tibetan imagination was the multi-formed myth of Rudra's subjugation. The details of this narrative are contained in Dunhuang documents dated after the fall of the empire in the tenth century.[32] The story they tell is set within the confines of Indian cosmology. Rudra begins as an aristocratic Buddhist practitioner who does not understand the teachings. He then becomes jealous of his realized servant, which leads him on an era-long, spiraling descent into jealousy, revenge, and other negative emotions until he becomes a demon king in charge of a great host. To vanquish this host, the buddhas—with the powerful Vajrapāṇi taking the lead—empower a wrathful emanation called Heruka (the blood drinker). Heruka ends the war with Rudra by defeating him in battle, plunging his trident into Rudra's collapsed chest, swallowing him whole, purifying him with his digestive juices so that his perception changes, and then expelling him through his anus. (The trope of environmental transformation is present, but the environment in which he is transformed is more bilious than most.) After this, Rudra offers up his and his retinue's palaces and begs to be taught the tantras. At tale's end, he is the protector of Heruka's tantric maṇḍala.

The Rudra myth was especially important to the Tibetan conversion narrative because it presented a model in which a powerful tāntrika could co-opt local nonhuman gods and spirits into the Buddhist pantheon as protectors. Focusing on the defeat and conversion of a region's gods and spirits rather than its humans was a very clever way to bring locals into the Buddhist fold. Once there were stories about the Buddhists defeating local deities and transforming them into their protectors, local traditions associated with these deities could be reconstructed as Buddhist practices.

The treasure tradition, in particular, produced many such subjugation episodes in different settings across the Plateau. One of the most well-known subjugation episodes is found in the story of the first dharma king, Tri Songtsen Gampo. It

describes how the king's efforts to bring Buddhism to Tibet were aided by the performance of a geomantic subjugation by his Chinese wife, Kongjo Wencheng. Her actions involved the pacification of a primeval demoness, whose body represented the entire Plateau and whose nightly demolition of Buddhist temples suggested she was none too pleased with the introduction of this new tradition into her domain.[33] In the end, the demoness was no match for Wencheng, who used her geomantic skills to determine the sites on which to construct "demon-pinning temples" (*'dul gyi lha khang*) that would enable Buddhism to flourish in Tibet. The first of these temples was the Jokhang in central Lhasa, which Rangjung Dorjé visited repeatedly; it was constructed on the demoness' heart. Other taming temples were built later,[34] across the Plateau on other pieces of her anatomy. One of these was the taming temple at Kyidrong, the Jamtrin Temple (Love Cloud Temple), in which Rangjung Dorjé would experience a vision as a child.

Despite their narrative influence on later events, it was not, however, Rudra or Wencheng who was destined to be the most recognizable subjugator on the Tibetan Plateau. "Tibet's demon tamer par excellence," as Jacob Dalton expressed it, was Padmasambhava.[35] Over a period of several centuries, beginning in the era of fragmentation, the character and idea of Padmasambhava infused the Tibetan conversion narrative, and consequently both its literature and landscape. In the developed version of his story—the version to which Rangjung Dorjé refers in his writing—Padmasambhava was a great *tāntrika* whom Tri Song Détsen invited to Tibet to help his guru, the Indian scholar Śāntarakṣita, establish Samyé Monastery. Padmasambhava's job was to subdue the area's nonhuman population. He then stayed on in Tibet and, with the help of his growing band of Tibetan disciples—including Rangjung Dorjé's previous incarnation Gyel Chokyang—was able to tame most of the land's spirits. He fought them until they begged for terms, and then bound them with Buddhist vows.

Developments in the story of Padmasambhava have been traced through several key texts such as the pre–treasure tradition *Chronicles of the Ba* [*Family*] (developed between the eighth and twelfth centuries) and, more influentially, Nyangrel Nyima Özer's *Chronicles of the Copper Palace*.[36] Rangjung Dorjé does not mention the *Copper Palace* in his writing, but he repeats its narratives, themes, and forms. A trope of this tale is Padmasambhava's journey to new lands in which he has to subdue local gods and demons. Several times, he even sings songs (*mgur*) about his adventures. One of the *Copper Palace*'s demon-subduing songs is called, for example, "The Song of Subjugating All the Haughty Spirits." It reads, in part:

> The *maṇḍala* of vast space
> Accommodates all four elements;
> They are accommodated, and there is still space.

The *maṇḍala* of mind
Accommodates appearance, existence, gods, and demons;
They are accommodated, and there is still space.

In the emptiness of mind, beyond ideas,
There are no gods, there are no demons;
So, whatever magic you show me,
I will not be moved an atom.[37]

Rangjung Dorjé visits many of the sites at which Padmasambhava was said to have tamed local gods and spirits. He experiences visions there and sings songs about his visions that praise Padmasambhava's efforts. He creates images and shrines for his hero. He also replays Padmasambhava's interactions with the long-lived gods Nyenchen Thangla and Yarlha Shampo and with the various groups of local female spirits that appear at pivotal points of his story, acting as his teachers, guides, and companions. And he understands himself to be continuing what he calls "Padmasambhava's activities" by extending the work of subjugation and conversion in areas his hero did not visit.[38]

SINGING WITH SIDDHAS

As the tale of an Indian tantric master in Tibet, Padmasambhava's story seems to have been especially important to Tibet's cultural geography because it represents an evocative solution to an enduring problem for Tibetan Buddhists: they had to find ways to represent the continuity of the lineages they inherited from India in Tibetan spaces. Telling and inscribing the stories of Indians like Padmasambhava—and later, Atiśa, Padampa Sanggyé, and others—was one way to do this, as was the memorialization of those Tibetans like Marpa who had traveled to India to bring back the teachings. Another way to do this was to integrate the environmental imaginaries of India and Tibet in literature, art, and architecture. Rangjung Dorjé focused on achieving this integration in his writing. As this chapter has already discussed, his praises were shaped by Indian poetic imagery. The imagery in his songs is less explicitly Indian, but their themes intersect so profoundly with the themes of the songs of the Indian *siddha*s that their Indo-Tibetan hybridity needs to be acknowledged.

The specifics about when, where, and for whom the *siddha*s—even the most famous among them, the *mahāsiddha*s—composed their songs are difficult to establish. Despite their mysterious origins, however, the *siddha*s' songs transformed

the way many Tibetans, including Rangjung Dorjé, approached song composition. Within the Tibetan Buddhist canons, there are song collections attributed to a variety of Indian *siddha*s, including the *mahāsiddha*s Virūpa, Kāṇha, Tilopa, Nāropā, and most influentially in Rangjung Dorjé's case, Saraha. Many of those who wanted to follow their example and become *tantrika*s in Tibet, also sang songs; the idea of the singing siddha became a highly influential biographical meme. But the songs the Tibetans sang were not carbon copies of Indian compositions; they combined elements of tantric norms and indigenous Tibetan compositional practices.

Most of the *siddha*s' songs were composed in three Indian genres: *dohā; caryāgīti,* or "practice songs"; and the more influential *vajragīti,* or "*vajra* songs."[39] The term *dohā* means "couplet." This genre is defined by a strict meter, characterized by thirteen or eleven *mātrā*—or syllable—lines with a caesura in each line.[40] The designator *gīti*, by contrast, is much more general. It is a colloquial version of the Sanskrit term *gīta* and refers to a similar semantic range as the Tibetan terms *mgur* and *glu*, and the English word "song"; *gīti, gīta, mgur, glu*, and songs can all be sung but are often preserved as lyrical poetry.

The words *caryā* and *vajra* indicate the context in which the songs were performed, rather than the content or form of the song. The "practice songs," of which there are considerably fewer examples, describe the *siddha*s' deeds and experiences, while the term "*vajra* songs" is employed to describe songs performed at tantric feast ceremonies, called *ganacakra*. These songs tend to speak more directly about the tantric view than do the practice songs, but there is also much crossover between their themes.

The Tibetans did not, for the most part, imitate the formal aspects of these Indian poetic forms. The metric and stylistic specificity of the *dohā* meant that few Tibetans attempted to reproduce this form in their own language.[41] The translation of the *gīti* probably had a more general influence on the composition of Tibetan songs, but its forms were rarely reproduced.

It is, furthermore, difficult to distinguish the influence of the *gīti* specifically from the influence of Tibet's greater translation project. Along with the already-discussed effect of *kāvya* on the synonymy and metaphor on the greater Tibetan canon, the Tibetan translation project introduced many Indian Buddhist themes and much Indian Buddhist imagery into Tibetan composition. But there are interlinked performative traditions and image sets from the collective Indo-Tibetan Buddhist cultural pool that are particularly prominent in both the *siddha*s' songs and the songs of their Indian lineal descendants.

Perhaps the most well-known of the *siddha*s' performative traditions that the Tibetans continued was the singing of "*vajra* songs" at tantric feasts on auspicious days.[42] Rangjung Dorjé's song collections, and other similar collections, contain

many such songs. The singing of songs at gatherings would have been an easy tradition to perpetuate because there were already many precedents for it within Tibetan society. Songs had been sung at gatherings in Tibet for centuries, either individually or in combination with tales of the ancestors and other religious heroes. The *Chronicle* and many other sources describe such events.[43] Indeed, the communal character of Tibetan songs had helped shape their form; their simple meters and rhythms, their tendency to repetition, their simple grammar, and their use of familiar, environmental imagery all facilitated performances. Moreover, many early Tibetan songs contain evidence of the communities that created them: they commonly praise ancestors and admonish heirs and rivals. These types of songs were still being sung at nontantric feasts during Rangjung Dorjé's time, at weddings and communal gatherings, and the same or similar songs are still being sung at these events today. The only elements that were specific to the *ganacakra* were their incorporation of tantric symbolism and ritual.

One element of this tantric symbolism that had a particular influence on the content of the Tibetan yogis' songs was its antinomianism. The Tibetan tradition already had a history of social criticism, but in the *Chronicle* and elsewhere, it was usually directed toward those who did not fulfill their role in traditional society. The *siddhas*' social criticism was, instead, directed at these social hierarchies, comparing them unfavorably with a spiritual hierarchy. This critique of social hierarchs and the practitioners of other religions is especially evident in their *dohā* collections. In the *dohā* attributed to Rangjung Dorjé's hero Saraha, for example, he accuses monks of trying to "dry up intellect," calls non-Buddhist *tantrika*s "fakes [whose] errors deceive the world," complains of the "acrid smoke" of Brahman offerings, and likens the bald heads of Jain ascetics to "girls' bottoms."[44]

As will become apparent as Rangjung Dorjé's story is told, and is also evident in Milarépa's liberation story and songs, many Tibetan new-tantra practitioners adapted the social critiques of the *siddha*s to Tibetan society. Instead of criticizing Brahmans and Jains, the yogis criticized familial chauvinism, landowners, the wealthy, and hypocritical religious elites. They even aimed at what Rangjung Dorjé calls the "haughty" poets who "mixed emptiness with half-truths."[45] These "haughty" poets he criticized were also, more often than not and probably not coincidently, members of rival lineages, particularly the Sakya, with whom Rangjung Dorjé and some of his lineal cohorts have a complicated relationship.

Another explicitly spatial theme of the *siddha*s' songs that had a profound influence on the songs and lives of their Tibetan followers was their songs' and liberation stories' promotion of life on the edges. It was, the *siddha*s claimed, much easier to attain insights on the edges of society in forests, in swamps, on remote islands, or in charnel grounds.[46] This insistence encouraged many of their Tibetan

lineal descendants to move to the peripheries too: the difference being that for Tibetans, the move to the edge was from the relative safety of river-valley villages to the hazardous, previously unoccupied, Himalayan heights. From this point on, the borderlands, the periphery, became the setting for the Tibetan yogis' discourses just as the jungles and charnel grounds had been for the *siddha*s' songs.

In Tibet, this movement to the hills came to be associated with one of its earliest and most enthusiastic proponents, Milarépa. Milarépa was not the first person to sing songs about tantra or yoga in Tibet, and it is almost impossible to separate out his songs and deeds from the later lyrical and biographical tradition that developed around them.[47] But it is also hard to overstate the influence his songs and stories had on Tibetan culture, and particularly its cultural geography. Milarépa changed the way that Tibetan literature presented its environment. His songs moved Tibet's cultural action from river plains "into the mountains."[48] The songs of earlier periods are set at the base of mountains, looking up,[49] and as such tend to focus on mountains with commanding aspects like Yarlha Shampo and Kailash in western Tibet. Milarépa's songs look down on villages from among the mountains' rocky caves.[50]

As Andrew Quintman noted in an article titled "Toward a Geographic Biography: Milarépa's Life in the Tibetan Landscape," the sites associated with Milarépa often overlapped with those associated with Padmasambhava, whose geographic biography was being inscribed in the landscape at around the same time. But while Padmasambhava's biographical range covers most of central and southern Tibet, as well as neighboring Himalayan kingdoms, Milarépa's life story is primarily located in southwestern Tibet. This was the region to which those wanting to emulate him first came, creating hermitages where he did retreats and sacred sites out of the places he immortalized in his songs.[51] The positioning of this geographic biography in some of Tibet's harshest terrain, in turn, created a strong impetus for those traveling in Milarépa's footsteps to replicate his behavior; for unless they adapted Milarépa's low-impact, ascetic lifestyle, they would not have survived. They practiced inner heat, which limited the amount of clothing and fuel they needed, and the "extraction of the essence," by which they could find sustenance from any vegetation, and reportedly even rocks. Despite these rigors, the numbers of those seeking this lifestyle continued to grow throughout the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. By Rangjung Dorjé's lifetime, they can be identified as a discrete social group, a group to which Rangjung Dorjé addresses many of his songs: the mountain hermits.[52]

MAṆḌALIZATION

The presence of yogi colonies in the mountains, in turn, led to a further reimagining of the mountains. As their colonies accrued layers of cultural history,

their locations were transformed into some of the most sacred places in the Tibetan cultural sphere. A few of these sites had already been considered sacred in pre-Buddhist times, and were simultaneously being co-opted into the geography of Padmasambhava's story, but most of their sacredness was tied to the stories and visions of Milarépa and the Milarépa-inspired yogis who took up residence in them.[53] Thus, although their legends also included images and stories from other periods, they are most closely associated with the worldview of the new tantras these yogis promoted.

Like the legends of Padmasambhava, the stories that grew up around Milarépa also contain narratives about him taming local spirits. A century or so after his life, three sites in southern Tibet that were first associated with this famous yogi were then re-presented as the *maṇḍala*s of his personal deity, the widely venerated tantric deity Cakrasamvara in union with his consort Vajravārāhī. Tsari in Kongpo came to be considered the deity's mind *maṇḍala*, Lachi—another mountain in the southern Tibetan borderlands—its speech *maṇḍala*, and Kailash its body *maṇḍala*.[54]

The process by which these mountains came to be viewed as *maṇḍala*s is often called *maṇḍalization*. Maṇḍalization usually involves the alignment of the region's features with the elements of a *maṇḍala*: a geographic feature (the mountains) or building representing its center inhabited by a deity and surrounding protectors often located in the cardinal directions.[55] The presentation of these three mountains was primarily linked to the practice of the new tantras that had recently been introduced from India. But it had much in common with the subjugation myths of the postimperial period. This time, however, the demon subduer was not Heruka; the subduers were Cakrasamvara and Vajravārāhī.

The story of how Cakrasamvara and Vajravārāhī subdued their non-Buddhist rivals Bhairava and Kālī follows Rudra's subjugation story closely, and Bhairava and Rudra are both said to be forms of the Indian god Śiva.[56] But the positioning of this subjugation story within the *Cakrasamvara/Vajravārāhī Tantra*'s cosmography led to an evolution in the story's setting, both in specificity and multiplicity. In the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*'s subjugation tale, twenty-four emanations of Cakrasamvara and Vajravārāhī defeat twenty-four emanations of Bhairava and Kālī at twenty-four sacred sites: the twenty-four *pīṭha*. The word *pīṭha* had been used in India to describe both the base of Śiva liṅgaṃ and Śakti yoni temples and the even earlier sites of goddess worship, but the enumeration of "twenty-four" specifically named sites was an innovation of the Buddhist tantras. What is more, although the tantras listed all twenty-four places, and some of these sites were famous, others were not, and this led to speculation about where they might be.[57]

The Tibetans, mainly from the Kagyü lineage, decided that some of them were located in Tibet at the three *maṇḍala* mountains associated with Milarépa: the two

pīṭha known as Kāñcī (or Cāritra) and Devīkoṭṭa were located at Tsari, Godāvarī was located at Lachi, and Himavat was at Kailash. These multiple reimaginings transformed their lineage's perceptions of the three mountains, but others were less impressed. Sakya Paṇḍita, who was critical of several Kagyü traditions, queried not only the positioning of the *pīṭha* in Tibet but whether pilgrimage benefited ordinary people at all. His opposition to the establishment of pilgrimage sites led to a centuries-long debate between the Sakya and Kagyü lineages about the importance of these mountains and other sites. An unintended consequence of this debate was that it made these sacred mountains, at least for a few centuries, sectarian sites, which were associated with the Kagyü, Nyingma, and (to a lesser extent) Kadam lineages.

It also meant that the Sakya took no account of the mountains' perceived sacredness in their practice of politics. Their rivals, the Drigung Kagyü, had been the first to colonize Lachi, Kailash, and Tsari, and the sites' fortunes rose and fell with the Drigung. After the Drigung and their allies, the Chagadai Khanate, lost the civil war to Qubilai Khan, access to these sites was evidently restricted. Despite Rangjung Dorjé's profound personal connections with Cakrasamvara and Vajravārāhī, for example, he was not able to visit Lachi or Kailash, and his visits to Tsari were cut short by political upheavals. These obstacles did not deter Rangjung Dorjé's commitment to either the efficacy of pilgrimage or the repositioning of *pīṭha* in Tibet, however. He helped to expand Tsari, playing a prominent role in the development of sites in the next valley over, which was called "New Tsari." He was also involved in the maṇḍalization of a new site on the southeastern fringes of the Tibetan Plateau, in Kham, called Khawa Karpo, which became a prominent pilgrimage place for many in that region.

THE KARMAPAS' *MAṆḌALA*

As the examination of his life in part II of this book will show, Rangjung Dorjé was influenced by all the historical layers of Tibet's cultural geography, and he created relationships with them not only by evoking their memories but by occupying their most symbolic spaces. But as he performs his spatial inheritance, he also adapted it to make space for the Karmapa lineage. He contributed to the sanctification process of two out of the three Karmapa monasteries that he was able to visit, Tsurpu and Karma. He did much to sacralize the hermitages he founded at Lha Teng near Karma, Déchen Teng near Tsurpu, and Nakpu and Lhündrup Teng in New Tsari. And his contributions to the Tsari and Khawa Karpo maṇḍalization projects also integrated the Karmapas into these symbolic spaces. He visited some

of Tibet's most sacred taming temples, the Jamtrin Temple in Kyidrong and the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, and by so doing entwined the Karmapas' story with the story of these temples. And his writing also did much to champion Tibet's cultural geographies, with their emphasis on religious symbolism, in opposition to the Mongols' political geographies that focused on the seats of myriarchies and the far-away imperial capitals, Dadu and Xanadu.

There is no suggestion in his writing that he had a master plan for the reformation of the region's cultural geography. There was not even a way to speak of "cultural geographies" or "mapping symbolic sites" in the Tibetan language of his time. But he does talk about wanting his audience to "look again" at their environment, and there are comments scattered through his poetic compositions that suggest he was aware of two primary ways to change people's views of a place: by adornment and deconstruction.

His poetry adorns sites by listing their sacred symbols and mythical associations, and describing them in poetic language, mainly synonyms and metaphors. It is found primarily in his praises to places. One of these, for example, his praise to Tsurpu, begins by aligning the Tsurpu River with the Lohita River, in northeast India. It then claims that "Śākyamuni Buddha traveled to this site as he strode through the three thousand (world systems) after manifesting Buddhahood." After listing other celestial and awakened beings that visited its valley, it changes tack and includes a poetic, *kāvya*-and-geomancy-inspired reading of the landscape. In this reading, "stone mountains look like great *garuḍas* in flight" and "clear, cool water-lily-like snow" coats the ground.[58]

His deconstruction of places is more common in his songs, which use the nondual perspective of *mahāmudrā* to question his audience's readings of their environments. From this point of view, awakening is understood to be the destruction of an unnatural dualism; a dualism that delimits a world of truly existent, real places outside and a truly existent, real self inside. "If you do not destroy superimpositions [of true existence] from within," he sings in one of his songs, "you may understand external things, but this will be useless; peel back the layers, and outside and inside are one."[59]

According to Rangjung Dorjé and the traditions of tantra and yoga he inherited, if there is no external place separate from your mind, yoga training will allow you to perceive external places however you wish. "Outside, inside, and other, these three, are all as they are," he says at another point in his songs, "they appear to me as rainbow paintings in the sky; simply vivid, clear empty appearances."[60] One of the techniques he uses to deconstruct his audience's environment is to suggest that what they see is only like what it appears: it is a rainbow, a mirror, a reflection, an illusion, a rainbow painting. He borrows this technique from the songs of the

Indian *siddhas* and his Tibetan lineal forebears and uses it to great—if somewhat repetitive—effect.

The use of unreliable imagery as a tool for deconstructing the perceived environment is one of the ways that his two techniques of deconstruction and ornamentation overlap. There are others. Some of his songs begin with one technique and switch to the other. In a song he sang at Mount Kharak, a sacred site on the border between Ü and Tsang, for example, he begins with ornamentation:

> In this level and beautiful alpine meadow,
> Calm will charm your mind, and concentration
> Adorn [it, affecting you the] same way the
> Myriad blossoming flowers do.[61]

And deconstructs this image in the same song cycle:

> But there is no realizing and realizer, so
> Holding onto this duality is [also] the base of *saṃsāra*,
> And seeing their essential lack of duality,
> Manifests the Buddha's essence directly.[62]

Occasionally, his poetry plays the two techniques against each other. The most obvious example of this is in the following verse from a praise to Déchen Teng Hermitage, which celebrates its opening. The poem promotes not only the hermitage but also past and future Karmapas' links with this place. But near the end of the poem, he writes:

> This will then become a site where reciprocal praise is performed between
> The sacred site [itself] and the actors who praise it repeatedly;
> [For] wherever there is praise, there is repetitive reciprocity,
> Wherever there is praise, it is repeated.[63]

This verse explains that by praising Déchen Teng, Rangjung Dorjé is inducing others first to praise it, then to praise themselves and others for being in such a praiseworthy place, and then understand this new round of praise as an indirect praise for Déchen Teng, which will, in turn, perpetuate another circle of praise. It is a process that reoccurs throughout not just the Tibetans' interactions with their culturally valorized places but most culture's reshaping of places. The process is not unusual. What is unusual is Rangjung Dorjé's commentary on it: the praise deconstructs the praise cycle as it constructs it.

This tension between ornamentation and deconstruction, and other comparable tensions within the praises and songs, evoke not only Rangjung Dorjé's complex relationships with the places he visits but also the organic rather than planned nature of his sacralization projects. Even though he remarks on the processes in his work, he describes them as procedures rather than plans. He remarks on his own clever, appealing, and strategic reactions to the cultures, events, and places he encounters, rather than outlining how sacralization will solidify his own and the Karmapa body rosary's position.

The same could be said for his contributions to the Karmapa reincarnation tradition as a whole. Rangjung Dorjé's liberation stories and songs do not reveal his grand plan to invent the reincarnation tradition. Rather, they paint a portrait of someone thoroughly engaged in the traditions that he inherited, who makes space for the Karmapa body rosary as he reproduces these traditions. This approach is true too of his relationship with the narratives, lineages, communities, and political conditions he inherited, as well as his relationship with the previous two Karmapas. By gaining an education, by practicing yoga, by teaching, by writing, and by performing songs he solidified his reputation as a Karmapa, and by doing these things, he solidified the Karmapa body rosary's reputation. No one event—not his recognition, not his relationship with the Mongols—solidifies his position as a reincarnate. But it does gradually solidify. He helped invent the reincarnation tradition merely by living his life.

NOTES

1. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 70.3–7; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 241.2–5.

2. Toni Huber examines the role of the Tibetan government in the Tsari pilgrimage in *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 128–176.

3. No matter how well viewers have been trained to see in one way, a place's associations can encourage them to view it in another way. Few would disagree with the physicist Niels Bohr's reported comment, for example, that Kronberg Castle in Denmark changes from just another old stone building into something more "as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived (there) . . . Suddenly the walls and the ramparts speak a different language. The courtyard becomes an entire world, a dark corner reminds us of the darkness of the human soul." See Gordon Mills, *Hamlet's Castle: The Study of Literature As a Social Experience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 1–2.

4. Yi-Fu Tuan, "Centennial Forum: Cultural Geography; Glances Backward and Forward," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 4 (2004): 729–733. I have chosen to use the term "cultural geography" instead of "sacred geography" or "symbolic geography" not to suggest that these places were not religious or symbolic but rather that "culture" is the best term to cover the relations between these various elements of life and its artifacts.

5. Massey, *For Space*, 71.

6. Tradition says that he was given the black hat as a sixteen-year-old, and this would mean it predated the monasteries as a symbol of the Karmapas, but this story is not in his early biographies. See Jackson, *Patron and Painter*, 40–42.

7. The process of the conscious transformation of perceptions of the environment through art took a very long time to develop in other cultures, so even this partial acknowledgment is notable. In the West, it began in the sixteenth century in Dutch painting but only reached a critical mass in eighteenth-century Romanticism, when images of rural idylls or rugged mountains were repeatedly created as a contrast to the unfolding Industrial Revolution. Even then, the Romantics presented the images they created as the unveiling of a location's inherent "beauty" and "sublimity"; their works of art were not intended to deliberately *transform* how the location was apprehended; see Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage, 1995). It was not until the twentieth century that the idea of purposely changing people's perception through representations of the environment developed. The first artists and theorists to pursue this idea unambiguously were groups like the Dadaists, surrealists, and psychogeographers. See Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Haperden, UK: Pocket Essentials, 2006).

8. Some biographies, like those of Mi la ras pa, mixed narrative with descriptive songs. In these cases, the songs often provide descriptions that complement the narratives, but at other times they form parts of the narrative. Many biographies, including Rang byung rdo rje's autobiographies and biographies, contain descriptions of visualization practices that include environmental imagery, visions, and visits to royal palaces and the like. Rang byung rdo rje and others also wrote autobiographies and biographies in verse, which blurs the distinction between poetry and narrative. But even with these caveats, it is still evident in much of the work in these genres in the centuries leading up to Rang byung rdo rje's time and in his own work that the genres of praises and songs contain more description than narrative, and the liberation stories and genealogical histories contain more narrative than description.

9. See van Schaik, "The Tibetan Avalokiteśvara Cult in the Tenth Century."

10. The following texts are all in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. *ca*: (1) *Mtshur phu'i bstod pa bzhugs so: gnas kyi tshul gsal bar byed pa snyang ngag gyi me tog gsal ba'i sgron me rdzogs*, 32–40; (2) *Bden gnas chen po bde chen gyi bstod pa*, 40–43; (3) *Dus bzi'i gnas la bsngags pa*, 43–49; (4) *Rong btsan kha ba dkar po'i bstod pa*, 49–53; (5) *Mtshur phu'i bstod pa thung ba*, 53–55. These praises to places are predecessors to a new genre, the pilgrimage guide book (*gnas yig*), which began to develop around the time Rang byung rdo rje.

11. Rang byung rdo rje, *Mtshur phu'i bstod pa bzhugs so*, 40.

12. Kapstein, "The Indian Literary Identity in Tibet," 773n76.

13. These two collections are in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. *ca*: (1) *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur* (*Collected Songs of Rangjung Dorjé*), 185–297; and (2) *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'gur* (sic) *thor bu* (*Miscellaneous Songs of Rangjung Dorjé*), 359–416. A separate manuscript copy of his collected songs was also uncovered and published from a private collection in the 1970s: *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur nam* (*Rangjung Dorjé's Songs*) (Bidung, Bhutan: Kunchhap, 1983). This one text contains most of the songs contained in the other two texts. The source text for this published copy came from the private library of Bla ma seng ge of Yol mo (also known as Seng brag sprul sku of Yol mo), in Nepal.

14. The term Rang byung rdo rje uses for melody or tune is *dbyangs*. As he sometimes uses this term to describe the whole unit of the song—its music and lyrics—he clearly understood a song's music to be an intrinsic element of its composition.

15. The term *mgur* is used in the Dunhuang documents in a variety of ways that are all associated with speech in the honorific register. The most common of these is as a speech marker in the expression *mgur nas*, literally meaning "from the throat." This word is also related to the contemporary honorific word for throat in colloquial Tibetan, *mgul*, which in turn is included within the contemporary, colloquial verb *mgul glu bzhes pa,* "to sing." The sixth Dalai Lama's songs are also called *mgul glu*.

Along with the two words *glu* and *mgur* there is another term used to describe songs in the *Chronicle*, which drops out of usage after the imperial period: *mchid*. Several scholars, including this author, have described *mchid* as a separate genre: Ellingson, "The Mandala of Sound," 229–234; Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 370–374; Braitstein, "Saraha's Adamantine Songs," 126; and Ruth Gamble, "Laughing Vajra: The Outcast Clown, Satirical Guru, and Smiling Buddha in Milarepa's Songs," in *New Views of Tibetan Culture*, ed. David Templeman (Melbourne: Monash Asian Institute Press, 2010), 372. Pad ma 'bum, by contrast, contended that this term *mchid* was used in the Dunhuang manuscripts not to describe a separate genre but in the answer section of a call-and-answer-patterned song (*glu*) sequence: "Tun hong yig rnying gi mgur la pyod pa'i sngon 'gro," in *Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies: Graz 1995, Part 2*, ed. Helmut Krasser and Ernst Steinkellner (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 641. More recently, Brandon Dotson analyzed the *Chronicle* and claimed there is little or no difference in the uses of the two terms *glu* and *mchid: The Victory Banquet*, 187–223. Like *glu, mchid*, he claims, was used to refer to songs sung by nonroyals and is, therefore, merely a nonhonorific designator of a song. After reviewing Dotson's work and the manuscript, I would concur, but I would also suggest that as the uses of *mchid* are found mainly in song cycles, there may be something to Padma 'bum's claim that a *mchid* is an answer.

16. There are differences in content and form between the *Chronicle*'s and the yogis' songs, and those analyzing Tibetan song forms have disagreed on whether they belong to a single genre. These analyses have been part of a larger project to categorize Tibetan songs and poetry. This categorization project has been made difficult by the extended history of Tibetan poetry and song singing, the overlap between the two traditions, and regional or even personal differences in indigenous categorizations of these lyrics and their music. As Charles Kevin Stuart pointed out in a 2008 analysis of Tibetan wedding songs in contemporary Amdo, "There are almost as many classification systems of Tibetan songs as there are Tibetans": Blo bstan rdo rje and Stuart, *Life and Marriage in Skya Rgya, a Tibetan Village* (New York: YBK, 2008), xxiii. A thorough study of the *mgur/glu* formal attributes, their meter, and so forth, which could categorize the *mgur/glu*, is beyond the scope of this study. As these songs are all connected by their common name but separated by individual performances of them, I also have reservations about the worth of such a study.

17. Other studies of *mgur/glu* have noted these characteristics too: Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 371; Don grub rgyal in his history of the *mgur/glu, Bod kyi mgur glu byung 'phal gyi lo rgyus dang khyad chos bsdus par ston pa rig pa'i khe'u ram par btsen pa'i skyed tshal*, vol. 3 of *Don grub rgyal gyi gsung 'bum*, eds. Ban ko and bKra rgyal (Chengdu, China: Mi rig dpe skrun khang, 1997), 485–583. He defines the *mgur/glu* as songs coming from and representing Tibet through its "air, earth, heart, snow, rivers, and mountains," 328.

18. I use the word *mtha'* because this is the word Rang byung rdo rje uses most often in his writing. Other Tibetan words with similar meaning are *mtha' khul* and *mtha' khob*.

19. Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, 24.

20. Dotson, *The Victory Banquet*, 310.

21. One point of difference is the close association between animals and people in the *Chronicle* that is less evident in Rang byung rdo rje's writing. He is more likely—perhaps influenced by the introduction of geomancy (*sa byad*)—to remark on the landscape's resemblance to animals.

22. Dotson, *The Victory Banquet*, 311.

23. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 390, 407.

24. Dotson, *The Victory Banquet*, 282.

25. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 393.

26. Rang byung rdo rje, *Mtshur phu'i bstod pa*, 35–36.

27. Wendy Doniger describes several of these contests in *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 274, 364, 510, 565.

28. This process is described in some detail in Galen Amstutz, "The Politics of Pure Land Buddhism in India," *Numen* 45, no. 1 (1998): 69–96.

29. Although it is a bit dated, Giuseppe Tucci's overview of *maṇḍala*s is still a useful introduction to the topic: *The Theory and Practice of the Maṇḍala* (New York: Dover, 2001). There have also been several more recent studies on the relationship between maṇḍalas and the environment, including Alexander W. MacDonald, ed., *Maṇḍala and Landscape* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1997); Toni Huber, "Where Exactly Are Caritra, Devikota, and Himavat? A Sacred Geography Controversy and the Development of Tantric Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites in Tibet," *Kailash*, 16, nos. 3–4 (1990): 121–165; Toni Huber, "Putting the *Gnas* back into *Gnas-skor*: Rethinking Tibetan Buddhist Pilgrimage Practice," *Tibet Journal* 19, no. 2 (1994): 23–60; Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 39–68; Toni Huber, "A Guide to the La-phyi Maṇḍala," in MacDonald, *Maṇḍala and Landscape*; Katia Buffetrille, "Reflections on Pilgrimages to Sacred Mountains, Lakes. and Caves," in *Pilgrimage in Tibet*, ed. Alex McKay (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1998); Katia Buffetrille, "The Great Pilgrimage of A myes rMa-chen: Written Traditions, Living Realities," in MacDonald, *Maṇḍala and Landscape*; and Katia Buffetrille, "The Evolution of a Tibetan Pilgrimage: The Pilgrimage to A myes rMa chen Mountain in the 21st Century," in *21st Century Tibet Issue: Symposium on Contemporary Tibetan Studies* (Taipei: Meng Zang wei yuan hui, 2003).

30. As Andrew Quintman quotes Chos kyi dbang phyug, there are "two modes of interaction between people and places: sacred sites that are blessed by individuals and individuals who are blessed by sacred sites": "Toward a Geographic Biography: Milarepa's Life in the Tibetan Landscape," *Numen* 55, no. 4 (2008): 363–410.

31. This process of defeat through sheer magnificence is described in several studies including John Powers, *Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 172.

32. Dalton, *The Taming of Demons*, 1–44, 159–205; Ronald M. Davidson, "Reflections on the Maheśvara Subjugation Myth: Indic Materials, Sa skya-pa Apologetics, and the Birth of Heruka," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14, no. 2 (1991): 197–234; Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 56–57. In the various narratives described in these studies, Rudra is called a number of names, including Maheśvara. To make the story easier to follow, however, I will call him Rudra.

33. This subduing has been the topic of several scholarly studies including Janet Gyatso, "Down with the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet," *Tibet Journal* 12, no. 4 (1989): 38–53; Ana Marko, "Civilising Woman the Demon: A Tibetan Myth of the State,"

Social Analysis 29 (1990): 6–18; Robert J. Miller, "'The Supine Demoness' (*Srin mo*) and the Consolidation of Empire," *Tibet Journal* 23, no. 3 (1998): 3–22; and Martin A. Mills, "Re-Assessing the Supine Demoness: Royal Buddhist Geomancy in the Srong btsan sgam po Mythology," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* 3 (2007): 1–47.

34. The various histories of these temples are described in Per K. Sørensen, Guntram Hazod, and Tsering Gyalpo, *Thundering Falcon: An Inquiry into the History and Cult of Khra 'brug, Tibet's First Buddhist Temple* (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, 2005). This work focuses on what the authors consider to be the first temple, the Khra 'brug temple in the Yar klungs Valley.

35. Dalton, *The Taming of Demons*, 66.

36. For an overview of *The Chronicles of Ba*, see Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, trans. and eds., *Dba' bzhed: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000). Regarding Padmansambhava's transformation, see Doney, *The Zangs gling ma*.

37. Nyang rel Nyi ma 'od zer, *Bka' thang zangs gling ma* (Khreng tu'u [Chengdu]: si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1989), 45. It should also be noted that the *Zangs gling ma* situates this singing of *mgur* by a religious figure to the imperial period. No such songs from this period have come to light.

38. Rang byung rdo rje describes an incident like this in *Rnam thar tshigs bcad ma*, 398. The story of this subjugation will be examined in chapter 8.

39. *Gīti* is the Apabhraṃśa (an archaic Indian colloquial language) equivalent of the Sanskrit word *gīta*, and as most of the songs to which I refer in the section were composed in Apabhraṃśa, I have retained this spelling.

40. Karine Schomer, "The Doha As a Vehicle of Sant Teachings," in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, eds. Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987): 61–89; Roger Jackson, *Tantric Treasures: Three Collections of Mystical Verse from Buddhist India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Jackson's work includes an impressive translation of three collections of *dohā* by Indian *siddha*s. As Kapstein has pointed out, the *dohā*'s meter was employed by Tulsidas (1532–1623) in his epic poem *Rāmcaritmānas* (*Lake of the Deeds of Rām*): "The Indian Literary Identity in Tibet," 48–62. Gamble explains how the term *dohā* came to be used in the Western tradition of Buddhism and in Buddhist-inspired poetry to refer to Tibetan compositions in the *mgur/glu* genre: "Cosmic Onomatopoeia or the Waterfall of Youth: Chögyam Trungpa and Döndrup Gyal's Parallel Histories of Tibetan *Mgur*," in *Contributions to Tibetan Literature: Texts, Genres, and Generic Terms,* ed. Jim Rheingans (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

41. This, in turn, meant that within Tibetan literature, the term *dohā* (transliterated as *do ha*) has almost always been used to describe Indic compositions. An exception is the Indophile Tibetan Tāranātha, who used the term as a descriptive title for one of his compositions. This work was called *The Vajra-Dohā of the Exceedingly Direct Lineage Bestowed by the Omniscient Tāranātha* (*Shin tu nye brgyud kyi bka' babs thams cad mkhyen pa tā ra nā thas stsal ba'i rdo rje'i do ha*). David Templeman's study of Tāranātha's life highlights the influence Indic culture had on him and provides multiple suggestions as to why he would compose a *dohā*: "Becoming Indian: A Study of the Life of the 16th–17th Century Tibetan Lama, Tāranātha" (PhD diss., Monash University, Melbourne, 2008).

42. This term *rdo rje'i glu* was used instead of the honorific *rdo rje'i mgur* until about the late fifteenth century. This new term came into use sometime before Kar ma 'phrin las pa (1456–1539) and Lha btsun rin chen rnam rgyal (1473–1557) were composing their works, as

they both use the term *rdo rje'i mgur*: see Karma phrin las pa, "Rdo rje mgur gyi 'phreng ba rnams" in *Chos kyi rje karma phrin las pa'i gsung 'bum* (New Delhi: Ngawang Topgay, 1975); and Lha btsun rin chen rnam rgyal, *Rje btsun Mi la ras pa'i rdo rje'i mgur drug sogs gsung rgyun thor bu* (Delhi: Sonam Rabten, 1985).

43. Kapstein, "The Indian Literary Identity in Tibet," 773.

44. Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 54–56.

45. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 92.4; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 257.1. "Half-truth" is my translation of the Tibetan term *kun rdzob bden pa*, which in turn is a translation of the Sanskrit term *samvṛtisatya*. Both these terms carry the idea that this "truth" hides or obstructs another truth. These terms are more commonly translated as "relative" or "conventional truth." I could not follow convention and use either one of these terms, however, as Rang byung rdo rje often plays with the meaning of word's individual syllables, and these translations lose the sense of the "hidden" in the Tibetan term.

46. These settings are apparent in the *siddhas*' songs and life stories. The songs have been translated in Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, and Per Kværne, *An Anthology of Buddhist Tantric Songs: A Study of the Caryāgītī* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1986). The life stories have been translated in Keith Dowman, *Masters of Mahāmudrā: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).

47. One of the most likely candidates for the adaptation of these songs from the Indian tradition is Pa dam pa bsang rgyas, the Indian guru who moved to Ding ri in, just near Rang byung rdo rje's birthplace. Despite Rang byung rdo rje's family associations with Pa dam pa bsang rgyas and his keen interest in the *dohā*, *gīti*, and *mgur/glu*, he does not mention any of Pa dam pa bsang rgyas's compositions or his lineage of songs.

48. This refrain of "into the mountains" (*ri la khrod* or *ri la 'gro*) is found repeatedly in most of the redactions of Mi la ras pa's liberation story.

49. This assessment is based on a reading of PT 1287 of the Dunhuang manuscripts and Dotson, *The Victory Banquet*. There is no mention in the *mgur/glu* of *The Old Tibetan Chronicle* of anyone looking down from the mountains. The closest images to this are those of animals—symbols of clan leaders—that sweep down from the mountains, but even these are written from the lower perspective.

50. Again, this perspective is evident in even the early versions of Mi la ras pa's tale. For an overview of these see Quintman, "Toward a Geographic Biography,"

51. Quintman, "Toward a Geographic Biography," 371.

52. The term I am translating here as "mountain hermit," *ri khrod pa*, could be translated more directly as "one who lives or travels among the mountains." The associated word *ri khrod* could be translated as "mountain residence." As their usage implies one living apart from the world and does not always imply a mountain residence, I have sometimes translated *ri khrod pa* as "hermit" and *ri khrod* as "hermitage."

53. Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, describes this process.

54. As Huber has pointed out in *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 41, the idea that these places are the abodes of deities rather than their embodiment is reflected in the Tibetan word that was used to describe these sacred sites, *gnas*, which is used as both a noun meaning "abode" and a verb meaning "to abide." See the introduction for a discussion of these terms.

55. The term *maṇḍalization* was first used by Allan Grappard to describe the alignment of geography with *maṇḍala*s in Japan: "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness: Toward a Definition of Sacred Space in Japanese Religion," *History of Religions* 21, no. 3 (1982): 195–221. All the studies listed in note 29 use this term to describe the Himalaya and Tibet.

56. Davidson, "Reflections on the Maheśvara Subjugation Myth," describes the link between these deities in detail, as does Dalton, *The Taming of Demons,* 23–76.

57. Diana L. Eck presents a comprehensive and wide-ranging study of these sites in *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Random House, 2012), 257–300. Tsunehiko Sugiki surveys their descriptions in Buddhist tantras and their commentaries in "The Structure and Traditions of the Systems of Holy Sites in Buddhist Saṃvara Cycle and Its Related Scriptural Cycles in Early Medieval South Asia," in *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, ed. Shingo Einoo (Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo), 516.

58. Rang byung rdo rje, *Mtshur phu'i bstod pa bzhugs so*, 32–40.

59. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 147.1; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i'gur thor bu,* 371.1.

60. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 57.2; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 230.1.

61. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 104.3–4; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 267.5–6.

62. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 101.5–6; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 265.3–4.

63. Rang byung rdo rje, *Bden gnas chen po bde chen gyi bstod pa*, 42. Tib. *gnas dang bstod pa'i bzlos gar dag. phan tshun bstod pa'i zlos gar gnas. gar gnas bstod kyang bzlos phan tshun. gar gnas bstod pa bzlos pa yin.*

PART TWO

The Journey of a Lifetime

FIGURE 5.1 Portrait of Rangjung Dorjé with scenes from his life. Courtesy of Hahn Cultural Foundation, Hwajeong Museum.

5

From Death to Childhood

Even if I do not always remember death,
Impermanence has no resting place—
By all means death will come, so
By any means, I will stay in mountain solitudes.

Rangjung Dorjé, aged between twelve and sixteen,
Khyung Dzong Hermitage, Tsurpu[1]

Rangjung Dorjé's life story begins with a death. A dying Karma Pakshi looks out his window at Tsurpu Monastery and contemplates his next move. What follows is an extraordinary tale of his entire journey from illness, through death, the in-between state, conception, the womb, birth, childhood, and recognition.[2]

The tale also describes how the second Karmapa became the third, and why the child of an itinerant potter should be treated as a realized, religious hierarch. To explain this incongruity, the story appeals to a series of higher, divine authorities. It presents Rangjung Dorjé as an already magisterial presence in the realm of the gods. The inhabitants of this world include the indigenous spirits of Tibet who had converted to Buddhism, as well as other, imported, nonhuman Buddhist deities; in Rangjung Dorjé's story, they all recognize his authority. These first, heavenly commendations are then echoed on earth by the unfolding process of his recognition as a reincarnate, and the two levels of acknowledgment reinforce each other.

It is a clever narrative strategy, and it was repeated with some variation in two texts that are both attributed to Rangjung Dorjé: the *Verse Liberation Story* and the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*. The importance of these two works

to the developing reincarnation tradition is evidenced both by their preservation and their citations in later Karmapa histories. But these two texts also presented internal and contextual problems for Rangjung Dorjé's biographers. To begin with, their narratives do not always agree, and biographers had to make strategic choices about how to tell both stories. But more interestingly from a historical perspective, the two narratives are also often at odds with later developments in the Karmapa tradition, and they must be adjusted, therefore, to meet expectations.

THE JOURNEY TO HEAVEN

The first adjustment the later storytellers made was to fix the date on which his story begins, the date of Karma Pakshi's death. Most versions of Karma Pakshi's biography say that he died "on the third day of the ninth month of the female water sheep year [1283]."[3] Later storytellers begin Rangjung Dorjé's journey toward birth on this date. In Rangjung Dorjé's autobiographies, by contrast, he describes the moment of consciousness transference more ambiguously and insinuates another date. The *Verse Liberation Story* reads:

> In the first month of the sheep year, I had a visionary experience, in which I saw the yogi Milarépa, in the center of Latö's Pelmo Tang Plain.[4] In his hand he held a skull full of nectar, and he said: "Emanate, and in the future, perform activities." [Following this advice], I was conceived in a place called Tsapu, [near] Milarépa's place of birth, in front of Gang Zhurmo [Snowy Pig Snout] Ridge.[5]

Similarly, the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State* reads: "In the first month of the sheep year, I felt a little uncomfortable in my elements. At that time, I was the one known as the Karmapa, and this was a sign that I should depart for another pure land [i.e., die]."[6]

Although it is possible to read both these quotes to suggest that Karma Pakshi died in the first month of the sheep year, their language is indeterminate. They could be read to indicate that Karma Pakshi died at this point, or they could be read to suggest that the Karmapa consciousness established an alternate emanation in Tibet in preparation for his imminent death. Given Rangjung Dorjé's preference for rebirth as opposed to emanation narratives, and his detailed description of the journey between lives, it would make more sense that he was ascribing an earlier death date to Karma Pakshi, but this evidence is not definitive. Either way, it suggests that the Karmapa consciousness generated a new human

body a year before Rangjung Dorjé's birth date. For later redactors, however, the ambiguity of these expressions and the contradiction between the date Rangjung Dorjé uses and the more widely accepted death dates for Karma Pakshi proved too problematic, and this was the only statement by Rangjung Dorjé that they completely expunged. As will become evident, this elision and the acceptance of a later death date for Karma Pakshi left them with a very short interregnum and, therefore, a need to develop a new, complicated, probably apocryphal narrative. But this insertion comes later in Rangjung Dorjé's interlife tale.

The next narrative divergence the later storytellers needed to align occurs not between Rangjung Dorjé's tale and other traditions, but between his two tales. They take alternate routes to the Buddhist heaven called Tuṣita, where the Karmapa consciousness stays for most of the interval between his lives. They could not expunge this section of the tale, for several reasons, all of which are derivative. To begin with, as the home of all future buddhas, Tuṣita is the starting point for the most well-known birth story in the Buddhist tradition: the birth story of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni.[7] According to this tale, which is outlined in detail in the *Sūtra of This Fortunate Aeon*, the Buddha Śākyamuni and all other past and future buddhas prepare for their final lives as a buddha of the eon by training in the Tuṣita paradise with the buddha who appeared before them. As the third buddha of this fortunate age, for instance, Śākyamuni trained in Tuṣita for eons with the buddha who preceded him, Kāśyapa, and after Kāśyapa had descended to earth, the buddha-to-be Maitreya began to train with Śākyamuni, until the latter departed for earth.

Repeating this narrative in the Karmapas' story was important not only because it offered a rare precedent for an interlife travel narrative but also because of the already-drawn links between the early Karmapas and the eon's sixth buddha, Siṃha. Being tied to Siṃha's trajectory necessitates that Karmapa emanations reside in Tuṣita and train with Maitreya. Unlike the Karmapa consciousness's other more temporary human emanations, Lodrö Rinchen is said to live steadfastly at Maitreya's side for eons, and will remain there until he descends to earth as Siṃha.[8]

As the setting for both the Buddha's authoritative prebirth tale and another emanation of the Karmapa consciousness, Tuṣita was, therefore, the logical destination for the interim consciousness. The two texts agree on this point, but they do not agree on how the consciousness got there. The *Liberation Story of the In-Between State* suggests the most direct route. It reads:

> I performed inconceivable magic.[9] I flew into the sky in a rainbow body, traveling upward to the god realms. There I was greeted with a variety of divine music performed by the gods. Many [other] inconceivable things

> [also] appeared to me, including innumerable divine parasols. In addition, [I watched as] bodhisattvas like Maitreya performed the deeds of awakening. Together [he and his entourage] cultivated immeasurable compassion for beings, training without respite in a state where nothing is generated, and nothing stops.[10]

Although it does not name it explicitly, this passage appears to be one of the "six dharmas of Nāropā," the yoga of the transference of consciousness at death. This episode suggests, therefore, that the Karmapa consciousness can direct its own rebirth. It claims realization, but not necessarily complete awakening.

The *Liberation Story in Verse* presents the Karmapa consciousness as a realized being too, but it makes this suggestion in an innovative way. It alludes to his realizations by describing a detour—or maybe even wrong turn—that he took on the way to Tuṣita.[11] It reads:

> In order [that others may] understand karma's infallibility, [my] in-between consciousness showed the way to enter [a corpse] in Tölung Partsang, but there was no un-ripened karma [in that situation]. [My intention] in showing [this method] was to delight people, so I spoke of it to the great Orgyenpa. Then the thought came that I should be born in lands free from extremes, and the visions of the in-between state arose.[12]

Tölung Partsang is a village down the valley from Tsurpu Monastery, and in this passage, Rangjung Dorjé states that his consciousness unsuccessfully "entered a corpse" there. He does not describe any details of the episode but does admit to telling Orgyenpa about it. As he only spoke to Orgyenpa in person as a child, it is, therefore, a story he told as a child, and it is very likely that his supporters would have used this story as evidence of his abilities. This usage of the story explains why Rangjung Dorjé included it in his autobiography, and why it was included in all later versions of his story. Unlike Rangjung Dorjé's version of the story, the later versions are all much more detailed. The next-briefest description of it is from the Karmapa biographies that were added to later versions of the *Red Annals*. It reads:

> [After Karma Pakshi had died] and his body was about to be burned, he looked out at all his suffering students in the lands of Tsurpu and swooned with intense compassion. When he regained his senses, he noticed the faultless corpse of a three-year-old child in Tölung Partsang and decided to "enter the residence" that was this corpse. After [the Karmapa consciousness] had

> entered the corpse, [the boy opened his] eyes and looked to and fro. The movement of her supposedly dead [son's] eyes disturbed the [dead child's] mother. She threw things at [the eyes] and stabbed them with a needle. The [Karmapa consciousness] did not think it would be able to help beings if it had no eyes, so it left to look for another body. Apart from an insect being carried by a bird in a house to the north, the consciousness could not find another [corpse], so it deemed it necessary to travel to Tuṣita.[13]

Like many of the retellings of Rangjung Dorjé's tale, the *Red Annals* took the bare description of events in Rangjung Dorjé's *Liberation Story in Verse* and expanded on it considerably. But unlike the retellings of many other episodes of his story, the later versions of this tale do not seek to reframe or change the original narrative. This fealty to Rangjung Dorjé's telling of this tale further suggests that this was a well-told tale, which was used from early in Rangjung Dorjé's life to enhance his reputation.

Another reason to believe that this tale was important to the construction of Rangjung Dorjé's identity as Karma Pakshi's reincarnation is the fact that it was preserved although it contradicts the more general histories of the transferral of consciousness tradition.[14] As Peter Roberts has noted, the practice that is called "entrance into a residence" (Tib. *grong 'jug*; Skt. *purapraveśa*)—or less prosaically, the "entrance into another's body" (Tib. *phar gzugs 'jug*; Skt. *parakāyapraveśana*)—is usually associated with either the Kagyü lineage's Indian forebears or Marpa's family.[15] Indeed, the most widely known story of this practice, taken from later versions of Marpa's liberation story, suggests that knowledge of it disappeared from Tibet when the only person to whom Marpa had taught it, his son Darma Dodé, died, transferred his consciousness into a pigeon, and flew off to India. Darma Dodé's story continues in India where he is said to have retransferred his consciousness into the deceased body of a sixteen-year-old boy who was about to be cremated, escaped cremation thanks to the intercessions of his parents, and later become the renowned *siddha* Tipupa ("the pigeon one"), who was one of Réchungpa's teachers.[16] Following the dramatic departure of the direct-transfer knowledge, later Kagyü practitioners are said to have only practiced what Roberts calls "the less-dramatic companion practice of transference . . . [to] a pure-realm,"[17] the kind of transference that the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State* intimates.

Rangjung Dorjé's narrative in the *Verse Liberation Story* sits at odds with this tradition, but it is directly engaged with it. His telling of the event again suggests a narrative in transition—one that is using previously established discourses to assert its own, innovative authority. This transition is not only evident in the idea expressed through the story that the "entrance into a residence" practice was

performed "to delight people," but also with the reversed allusions it makes to Darma Dodé's story. Whereas Darma Dodé took over a pigeon's body and flew to India, the only animal corpse to which the Karmapa consciousness has access is a dead insect being carried by a bird, which is to say a body that cannot be controlled. Whereas Darma Dodé was able to find a child's body after inhabiting a bird's body, the Karmapa consciousness is unable to find a bird's body after inhabiting a child's body. Moreover, while Tipupa's family delighted in his return, the family at Tölung Partsang did not take kindly to the reanimation of their dead son's corpse, acting toward him as if he were a zombie, a "risen corpse" (*ro langs*). By reversing the tale in this way, Rangjung Dorjé is at once drawing on its authority and showing the problems that may arise from this kind of consciousness transfer. His message, in brief, is this: I tried the old way, but it did not work, so I had to try something different.

This may have appealed to Rangjung Dorjé's audience, but for later storytellers this was yet another section of his birth story that they adjusted. To begin with, his two versions of the same story contradicted each other. As in many other adjustments to Rangjung Dorjé's tale, it was Tsuklak Trengwa, writing in the sixteenth century in his *Feast for Scholars*, who proved to be the most innovative and influential in his response to these narrative dilemmas. Unlike Rangjung Dorjé, who described his journey twice, Tsuklak Trengwa was only telling his tale once, and this telling needed to be authoritative. Instead of telling two stories, he presented a gymnastic version that incorporated both. It reads:

> After [Karma Pakshi] passed beyond suffering [i.e., died] he instantly established bodies in Tuṣita and other god realms. As soon as he created these appearances he was offered unlimited clouds of offerings, and this seems to have distracted him a little, [for] eight [earthly] days passed [without him noticing]. Then, when this [heavenly] moment had passed, he gazed on his son-like disciples with great compassion and [reentered] his corpse. [Shortly after this] it was purified [i.e., cremated]. [Leaving it behind] he saw a land full of lamentations, and it was as if he became insensate with compassion. This [compassion] led him to think that to help wanderers he needed to "enter a residence" [*grong 'jug*].[18]

In a reflection of the narrative of the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*, this passage has the consciousness travel directly up to Tuṣita where it is welcomed by the gods. But then to fit with the *Liberation Story in Verse* narrative, the consciousness travel back to its recently abandoned body, reenters it, see that it is about to be burned, and leaves it again. The long stay away from the deceased body is

explained by citing the alternate temporalities of the two realms: what seemed like an instant in the god realms equals eight days passing on earth.

It is an inelegant narrative, but it performs the same primary function as both of Rangjung Dorjé's narratives; that is, the story of his journey out of Karma Pakshi's body provides a continuity of presence *between* emanations that had been missing from the previous descriptions of concatenate lives. For Rangjung Dorjé to establish his authority beyond doubt, however, it was not enough to demonstrate that he was Karma Pakshi's reincarnation; he also needed to establish that the continuity between his lives had divine backing. To do this, like the Buddha before him, he called the earth to be his witness.

THE EARTH GUARDIANS' HEAVENLY SHOW

Whereas the Buddha called one earth deity, the Indian goddess Bhūmisparśa, to act as a witness for his awakening, Rangjung Dorjé evokes a sky full of female earth guardians to witness and endorse his birth. The *Verse Liberation Story* describes this incident succinctly:

> In the [in-between state] I saw the earth guardians who admonished me to be kind and to be born in Jambudvīpa [Rose-Apple Continent]. Through the in-between appearances, they also granted me the empowerment of the sixty-four Cakrasamvara *maṇḍala*s. Then they sang verses of auspiciousness.[19]

In the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*, by contrast, most of the text is dedicated to the interaction between this group of divine women and the Karmapa consciousness. "Take a human rebirth with time and chances," they say to him, "protect the Buddha's teachings, parent the six [types] of wanderers, the time has come!"[20]

For his part, the Karmapa consciousness begins the ensuing call-and-answer narrative with disbelief; not only is he disinclined to acquiesce to their proposition, he even doubts their very existence. He reports:

> I thought they were a faulty vision and started trying to destroy the conceptualization, but these celestial wanderers did not want to wander off. [Eventually] I replied to them: "You are here, but from where did you come? You are here, but when will you leave? I don't have access to parents that could create a person with the time and chance [to practice Buddhism]. I don't have the wisdom to protect the Buddha's teachings. I don't have the

residual karma to parent the six [types] of wanderers. Go find another regent to make prophecies about!"[21]

But the earth guardians were not that easily dissuaded. Instead of disappearing, they presented him their credentials. They represent the land of Tibet, they say, and will not be easily dissuaded. Their tone is as combative and disrespectful as the Karmapa consciousness had been to them. They reply in verse:

We come from the depths of the human world.
We are the earth guardian *ḍākinī*s who protect the environment.
We do not scold you for our own purposes, human.
We scold you on behalf of the six [types] of wanderers![22]

Following this exhortation, they introduce themselves individually, and as they do, they offer the Karmapa consciousness their "life forces" (*srog snying*). The idea of "life force," usually handed down from parents to children, is found throughout indigenous Tibetan traditions and is linked to the similar concept of *bla* (pronounced "la"), which refers to an individual's own "subtle life essence."[23] In the Tibetan imagination, this substance is located both within the body and outside it, in environmental features like lakes, mountains, or trees.[24] The multiple sites for a life force link it to a region's nonhuman inhabitants and create strong identifications—often presented as an extension of family lineages—between individuals, external sites, and the deities that inhabit them. The perceived interconnections between the environment and the body mean that by offering their life force to the Karmapa consciousness, the earth guardians are doing two things. First, they are offering him the force of all the internal and external places they represent. And second, they are creating a link between his body-to-be and these places.

The first five guardians to offer their life forces, "the five exceptional, principle earth guardians," are associated solely with his body. They are (1) Descending Vajra, [Moving] Upward, from the secret (place, i.e., his genitals); (2) Blazing Splendor Vajra, at the top of his head; (3) Very Strong Vajra, at his extremities (legs); (4) Powerful Victory Vajra, at his hands; (5) Roaring Conch Vajra, at his mouth.[25]

Although each of these is said to represent an individual being, they can also be read as symbols of talents that the Karmapa new body will possess. In an analogy that is repeated in his songs,[26] for example, the first guardian, Descending Vajra, which is moving upward from the genitals, suggests that the new Karmapa will have control over his sexuality and could, therefore, practice perfect celibacy. The

Roaring Conch Vajra at his mouth suggests eloquence. And the Blazing Splendor Vajra at the top of his head suggests charisma. Along with qualities that would seem necessary for a good monk and a good teacher, this group of *ḍākinī*s is also said to endow him with an intense physicality that would at first seem less crucial for such a life: strong legs and powerful hands. While this description may initially seem " unmonkish," it does, however, fit with the Indian Buddhist iconographic tradition of ascribing strength to monks.[27]

The other twenty of the twenty-five earth goddesses are, by contrast, all positioned outside in the Tibetan environment. They not only represent various classes of autochthonous Tibetan spirits but also various layers of Rangjung Dorjé's cultural history. The group associated with the oldest historical layer of Tibet's cultural geography is the "female protectors of the four doors." The image of four females guarding the cardinal gates of a *maṇḍala* is a common tantric trope, but it is not these four protectors that Rangjung Dorjé describes here. Instead, he evokes a more obscure list of directional guards, one of which has been traditionally associated with the Bön tradition.[28] This deity is called the Great Conch-Vajra of the Tāgshi (Tajik) Door, a name that suggests she was a protector of a westward pass out of Tibet into the Land of the Tajiks and, therefore, one of the four protectors of border passes in the cardinal directions.

The largest group within the twenty-five is more easily identified. It is the "twelve local goddesses" who were tamed and made protectors of Buddhism by Padmasambhava on Latö's Pelmo Tang Plain, near to where Rangjung Dorjé would soon be born. As they present their credentials to Rangjung Dorjé, the group of twelve is divided into three groups of four, each representing a different class of indigenous spirit. In later traditions, all twelve of these deities came to be associated with specific mountains and lakes on the Plateau.[29] It is unclear just how developed these associations were during Rangjung Dorjé's time, but it is clear from Rangjung Dorjé's dialogue with them that the group's identity is intimately connected to the land.

The last four earth protectors to present themselves to him are four of five of the "five sisters of long-life."[30] This group is associated with Mount Gauri Sankar on the border of Tibet and Nepal. Although Padmasambhava reportedly tamed these goddesses too, they are most often associated with Milarépa, who acted as their human consort.[31] Their presence in Rangjung Dorjé's narrative evokes another of the temporal layers of Rangjung Dorjé's cultural map; they conjure up the specter of later transmission and the new tantras.

All of the above spirits are female and, in Rangjung Dorjé's estimation, realized. His understanding that these are women with high spiritual authority is conveyed through the term he uses to describe them: *ḍākinī*,[32] which suggests that he

considers them all to be powerful otherworldly practitioners of tantra. The relationship he begins with the *ḍākinī*s on this occasion continues throughout his life. Despite his respectful relationships with local male spirits, it is the *ḍākinī*s he meets in the various places to which he travels who act as his teachers and confidantes. These cross-gender relationships stand in stark contrast to his interactions in the human world, and this helps to emphasize their otherness. Apart from his mother, the humans with whom he interacts closely are all males.

His reversal of gendered relationships in the spirit world—and a glimpse into the processes of cultural map-making—is evident in the next section of the text too, when a lone male makes an appearance in Rangjung Dorjé's vision. This being is Black Coat (*Ber nag chen*), an emanation of the tantric deity Mahākāla, who, in Rangjung Dorjé's story, is in the process of becoming the Karmapas' personal protector. In this part of the story, unlike in his other appearances throughout Rangjung Dorjé's life story, he does not appear at the behest of the Karmapa but rather to support the earth guardians; in this narrative, he, a powerful male protector deity, does the female spirits' bidding. What is more, he appears in tandem with another group of four women, who, like him, abide in shadows: the guardians of the four "hidden lands."[33] The text continues with Rangjung Dorjé's narration:

> [Then the *ḍākinī*s all said], "If we cannot urge[34] you [to take rebirth], we will call up our many companions [to do it]. Who will we call? We will call the dharma protector Black Coat, and the four great principal female protectors of the four hidden lands. If we cannot convince you, [their presence will]. They will fill the world, from the space of the dancing deities to the *nāga*s' underground realm."
>
> This is what they said, and as I listened, it happened. "Well then," [they continued,] "our companions have arrived. Here are the four great guardians: Vajrasatri and below her, virtuous Vajra Li, protector of children; below her, Vajra Waterfall, the singular *menmo*; and below her, Vajra Yuchungma [Small Turquoise].[35] With them is the dharma protector, Black Coat. From the shadows, they praise beings that do not pass into *nirvāṇa*."[36]

The introduction of shadows and darkness into what had been a colorful vision foreshadows the abrupt change in atmosphere that is about to occur when Rangjung Dorjé enters his mother's womb. Moreover, this change in tone is not the only way that this introduction foreshadows his entrance into the womb; the name of the last protector of a hidden land, Yuchungma, is also his mother's name. In this way, the lowest of the hidden lands is aligned with her, and more specifically her womb, toward which he is gradually progressing.

Even this does not convince the Karmapa consciousness. It replies to them abruptly:

> Hearing [your words is like] being pierced by a chisel;
> It is a rock, a missile hurled at my meditation.
> Why don't I see you disintegrating, cracking, and fading away?
> Are the six [types] of wanderers all happy and healthy?
> [Of course not,] so why do you all, their guardians, look so joyful?[37]

Eventually, after four more exchanges like this, he finally concedes that they are both real and right, and he will follow their advice by becoming human again. But before he agrees to this, he manages to convince them to find parents of the best "type" for him and grant him an "inconceivable celestial empowerment" into the "*maṇḍala* of the sixty-two deities of Cakrasamvara."[38] After granting the empowerment, the earth guardians then offer him verses of auspiciousness, which in the story represent a further round of granting him qualities. The song of auspicious verses they sing for him is very long, but here are two exemplary verses:

> On the tongue, lotus, honey, and
> The words of poetry are pleasant;
> Whatever auspiciousness this lotus tongue has,
> May this sacred portent flourish in you, right here, right now!
>
> . . . Magic hands write letters and weave threads
> Into all that is needed and desired;
> Whatever auspiciousness these magic hands have,
> May it, this sacred portent, flourish here in you, right now![39]

After granting him all these boons, the earth guardians then move the story to its climax, and his conception—which, in keeping with their nature, is presented through environmental imagery. Rangjung Dorjé narrates:

> Precious rainbow roads of various colors [lead to] the place where a human body with free time and chances would be formed. [The *ḍākinī*s said:] "It is in providential Mangyül Gungtang. The mother is the noble, providential Yuchungma, who lives in front of a sacred site called Gang Zhurmo [Snowy Pig Snout] Ridge. The father's house of clear *bindu* is on the providential Om Plain, in precious Tsapu in front of Chewagang [Snowy Tusks] Ridge. This is the [lower] valley where the three upper valleys meet. The Tsa-lung-pu Valley in Mila's birth region. [The site of conception is between two mountains:]

to the south is a lustrously clear dark red mountain, and to the north is a glimmering white mountain. These are the undesired bodily frames."[40]

The basic arc of this passage describes a descent from the in-between state, which is loosely aligned with Tuṣita, to the generally experienced geography of the area in which Rangjung Dorjé was about to be born, the border region between Mangyül Gungtang and Latö. But in making this journey, the story also evokes several other layers of symbolism and meaning.

The most easily distinguishable of these is the link that it draws between Rangjung Dorjé and Milarépa. By situating Rangjung Dorjé's father in "Mila's birth region," it creates a paternal link between Rangjung Dorjé and one of the fathers of his spiritual lineage. The connection between Rangjung Dorjé and Milarépa is further strengthened in the *Verse Liberation Story* by the suggestion that it was Milarépa who summoned him to the region while standing in "the center of Latö's Pel[mo] Tang Plain."[41]

The most prominent allusion in this passage, however, is not between his spiritual and familial lineages; it is between the geography of his birthplace and the processes of conception. As Rangjung Dorjé understood it, the development of a fetus involved the development of a subtle-energy system that formed a nexus between mind and body. Presentations of this system are found in both the tantras and in the Tibetan medical system. There are variant permutations in the presentations of these systems, but they also all share the common elements to which he refers in this passage.

These elements include the description of the subtle-energy system based on a complex of channels, called *tsa* (*rtsa*) in Tibetan, through which travels subtle energy called *lung* (*rlung*) in Tibetan. The most important, central channel sits near or in the spinal column, passing through centers of energy called "wheels," and usually remains empty. Two other channels flank it: one on the right that is white and through which subtle energy travels downward; and one on the left that is red and through which subtle energy travels upward. These two channels connect at the nostrils, and in yogic body maps, ordinary respiration travels through them. The aim of advanced tantric practices is to join them at the bottom too, and, therefore, direct energy up through the central channel.

The last element of the subtle body is usually called *bindu* in Sanskrit.[42] *Bindu* consists of red and white reproductive substances, which cause conception when the white-male substance—associated with sperm—merges with the red-female substance, which is also sometimes referred to as "blood." Each being possesses both white and red *bindu*, having received the white *bindu* from their father and the red *bindu* from their mother at conception. Following conception, these two

elements then migrate in opposite directions within the body—white upward and red downward—readying themselves to act as a basis for new life if the opportunity arises. These substances are sometimes aligned with the life force,[43] which the earth guardians offered the Karmapa consciousness.

The link between fetal development and the layout of these channels, subtle energy, and life forces caused *tāntrika*s to pay particular attention to the processes of conception. By understanding these processes, they thought, they could map the channels of their own bodies. Rangjung Dorjé included a chapter on fetal development in his most famous work, the *Profound Inner Meaning*, for example, and also composed a song to aid his student's memorization of the process.[44]

While his descriptions in these texts is quite straightforward, his allusions to the conception and development process by way of environmental imagery in this section of the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State* are more obtuse. At the center of this analogy, his parents are associated with geographical sites. His father, represented as a house made of "clear *bindu,*" sits "on a plain in the providential land of Om"[45] next to Chewagang (Snowy Tusks) Ridge in Tsapu. Tsapu means "the upper part of the Tsa Valley." The Tsa Valley is a side valley off the well-known Kyidrong Valley in Mangyül Gungtang. Milarépa's place of birth is farther up the Kyidrong Valley at a place called Kyangtsamo, and as a consequence the whole Kyidrong Valley is associated with Milarépa. On modern maps, the Kyidrong Valley runs down to the border of Nepal. The site where Tsapu Valley converges with Kyidrong is close to the Nepal border. It is also near to where two other valleys join the Kyidrong Valley: the Rön Valley and the Gün Valley. The Lower Tsa Valley is, therefore, "the river valley where three upper-valleys meet." Rangjung Dorjé's mother, the "noble, providential Yuchungma"—who, remember, is the protector of the lowest of the hidden lands—is positioned "in front of the sacred site, Gang Zhurmo (Snowy Pig Snout)," which is the name of a jagged mountain ridge, considered a sacred site, in the next valley over from Kyidrong Valley.[46] His parents are, therefore, aligned with two valleys that descend from either side of the same mountain range, both from peaks on that range that are associated with pig tusks. The mountain valley that separates them also marked the boundary between Mangyül Gungtang and South Latö: Rangjung Dorjé's father was in Mangyül and his mother in Latö.

After aligning his parents with this geography, he then begins to merge the external geography with the map of the subtle body described by the embryological tradition. He changes the name of Tsapu Valley—the first syllable of which could mean either "grass" or "channel"—to Tsalungpu Valley, which means "upper valley of channels and subtle winds," and explicitly suggests the development of a subtle body. This change, in turn, grants another shade of meaning to his father's

position at the site "where three upper valleys meet"; it can now be read as an analogy for where the three channels meet in the body.

As Daniel Berounský has pointed out in an analysis of this paragraph, the text then represents the red and white *bindu* more directly by framing this whole event between a maroon-colored mountain to the south and a white-colored mountain to the north.[47] But to make sure no one reading or hearing this story could mistake this as an analogy for an ordinary conception, the two mountains that represent the essence of his parents are then described as "undesired." This suggests that unlike most beings, who are drawn into the processes of birth by their attraction to copulating parents, Rangjung Dorjé joined his consciousness with these elements without a desirous impulse.[48] He suggests he was in control, describing the last phase of this journey to the womb thus:

> As they explained the [conception process], [the *ḍākinī*s] created a nine-colored rainbow that became intensely [bright]. Then they all left on the rainbow as I watched. I traveled [alone] on [the rainbow in the opposite direction] to a crystal palace with a sky door, four bright white sides, and a dark base. [As I descended,] rainbows [moved] freely on all sides.[49]

This description of a crystal palace with a sky door and four bright white sides evokes an image very similar to that of Rangjung Dorjé's father's *bindu* house, but as he enters it through the sky door, the tone and color of his story change dramatically.

THE PROBLEMS WITH WOMBS

Unlike his very colorful, controlled sojourn in the in-between state, Rangjung Dorjé's description of life in the womb is much less appealing, much less controlled, and darker. In the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State* he described it like this:

> As soon as I entered the house, waves of passionate blood were aroused and I watched [the earth guardians] flee . . . Then it all went dark, and I fainted. As I gradually came around, all was dark and I [felt] a heavy weight. I was whirling in a small space. Even now as I remember it, I feel I am spinning in a small space. When my perception became clear, sometimes it was as if I were tossed by waves, sometimes squashed by mountains, sometimes burned by heat, sometimes frozen by cold. I was confused. There was no air. This is the suffering of the afflictions, and even now when I think of it, the wind rises in my heart.[50]

Just in case his audience had any doubts, he repeats the story in the *Verse Liberation Story*:

> I traveled down a path of a myriad, intermingled rainbows to somewhere near Nyenam. There was a crystal palace, which had a jeweled staircase. I thought, "I should stay there," and it appeared I would, but—*kye ma!*—the darkness of the womb is a dark family lineage, and abiding karma is [a cause of] great suffering for wanderers. Powerless, I lost consciousness and dwelt in afflictions.[51]

In choosing to describe the womb in this way, Rangjung Dorjé was adhering to another well-used narrative. Similar descriptions of an in-between consciousness entering what they perceive to be a house, only to suffer in a womb, can be found in Indian Abhidharma texts[52] and, perhaps more influentially in his case, in Gampopa's text *An Ornament of Liberation*.[53] In these texts, descriptions of the womb are usually included within a list of all the possible sufferings that a human can experience; beings suffer in life, in death, in the in-between state.

In concurring with these descriptions of the womb, Rangjung Dorjé again demonstrated his predilection for precedent, but from the perspective of later storytellers, his adherence to this particular precedent was problematic. Their major problem with his description was that, in both retellings of this tale, he explicitly states that he loses awareness.[54] To many, this may seem an inconsequential matter, but to those who sought to establish the Karmapa lineage's status as either buddhas or almost-buddhas, it was intensely problematic. For, according to Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma*, one of the clearest marks of realized beings is their ability to remain conscious throughout the in-between state.[55] They were also concerned with his description of a very un-Buddha-like experience of suffering and uncleanliness in the womb. To resolve both issues at once, later writers created a commentary that changed the meaning of the section by suggesting it was an example of his "skillful means." In this framing commentary, they say that Rangjung Dorjé only described the womb as a dark and adverse place to assist those less realized than he, who would experience their mothers' wombs as sites of intense suffering. In his reality, by contrast, they contend, his sojourn in the womb was the same as Śākyamuni Buddha's womb stay, which had been described in the *Lalitasvara Sūtra*. Like the Buddha, the Karmapa consciousness had experienced the womb as a blissful, crystal palace. Tsuklak Trengwa, again setting the example in a commentary that others would follow, explains away Rangjung Dorjé's description of unconsciousness and in filth in the following way:

> That is what it says in the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*, but to a few of his purer students he said that his mother's womb appeared to him naturally as a blissful crystal palace and that he had [merely said otherwise] to aid many beings.[56]

This was not even the only uterine controversy with which revisionists had to contend. They also had to work in an explanation of the short time span between Karma Pakshi's accepted death date and Rangjung Dorjé's birth. As mentioned earlier, this does not arise as a problem in Rangjung Dorjé's own narrative, as he described his consciousness leaving Karma Pakshi's body a full year before his own birth, with plenty of time to pass through the various stages of the in-between state and gestation. But as the reincarnation tradition developed after his death, the ambiguities of this episode became less acceptable.

Solving this narrative puzzle, it seems, was the most difficult of all the later adaptations of the tale, and eventually required the creation of an alternate description of his time in utero. Such a description was purportedly given by Rangjung Dorjé to Orgyenpa at their first meeting, but none of the early life stories of either participant include it.[57] The earliest extant version of the conversation is in Tsuklak Trengwa's retelling, in which, in response to a question from Orgyenpa regarding the shortness of his stay in the womb, Rangjung Dorjé says the following:

> This is how [I did it]. For the first four months, a part of my ground-of-all entered into [the fetus], which meant that I projected the form through "the fivefold manifestation of awakening," [associated] with the period of "the causal *vajra*-holder." Later, the entirety of my ground-of-all-consciousness entered [the fetus], and I actualized the state of innateness. At this point, I was encouraged by the song of the earth guardians to make apparent "the resultant *vajra*-holder," which is the complete construction of the three beings [i.e., the three bodies of a buddha].[58]

This description is notably different from Tsuklak Trengwa's other narratives of the in-between state and the womb in two distinct ways. First, there is a profound shift in literary tone: while the other accounts of his journey are descriptive and sometimes allegorical, this passage is entirely technical. Moreover, in this technicality, it is also imprecise. As other scholars have noted, Rangjung Dorjé's approach to the ground-of-all consciousness, the most basic level of consciousness, was a pivotal element of his presentation of Buddhist ontology, and

he goes to great lengths to assert its nonduality. In one of his songs, he explains it this way:

> The ground-of-all is the base of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*—
> When you do not realize it, you are in *saṃsāra*,
> When you realize it, it is the Tathāgata's mind;
> This is an expression of the ground-of-all's nature.[59]

Given his presentation of the ground-of-all consciousness as basic and pervading, it is, therefore, passing strange that here he is speaking about its "parts." This unexplained technical imprecision is not the only way that this passage departs from his usual modes of expression. It is also unusual in that the terms used in the passage to describe his birth are those that describe the birth of a fully awakened buddha, a personal status he explicitly rejects in other places, even casting doubt on his capacity to attain awakening in time to manifest as the future Buddha Siṃha.[60]

The first of these self-elevating terms is the use of the "fivefold manifestation of awakening" to describe the process of fetal development.[61] This was the process used by the Buddha Vairocana to create a buddha-body in the *Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra*, and in this text, in turn, it is said to follow "the manner of [bodily development] outlined in the *Tattva-saṃgraha Tantra*."[62] In drawing this parallel, the passage indicates that the fetus was the in-utero—or in-crystal-palace—body of a fully awakened buddha. A similar assertion is made later in the passage when he says that his in-utero body was "the resultant *vajra*-holder." This term is a synonym for the form body, or *rūpakāya*, of a buddha—the combined *sambhogakāya* and *nirmaṇakāya*—when it is achieved through tantric practices.[63] The association with the Buddha is then made even more explicit later in Tsuklak Trengwa's narrative, when Orgyenpa's entourage, the audience for this section of his version of Rangjung Dorjé's life-story, exclaims: "In India only Śākyamuni and in Tibet only you are known to have relied upon a stainless womb."[64]

STORIES OF BIRTH

Whether it was a crystal palace or a confining, confusing jail, both versions of the story at least agree that the womb was only a temporary stop on Rangjung Dorjé's journey between life, and sooner or later he left it. The *Liberation Story*

of the In-Between State ends just before his birth, but the *Verse Liberation Story* describes it in some detail, stating:

> On the eighth day of the monkey year's [1283] first month, as the moon waxed, near the sacred, exalted one's [*rje btsun dam pa*] place, I was born in accordance with [Karma Pakshi's] prophecy. I do not remember the pain of birth, but my faculties were not impaired, and my mind did not waver. When I saw the moon, it made me happy. I could speak, but did not, remaining [as silent as] a jewel.[65]

This passage at least fixes his birth date; he was born on the eighth day of the first Tibetan month—early spring—in the year 1283, but in later versions of his story, all the other details of this passage have been interpreted variously. His place of birth has been moved; his reaction to the moon has changed; and his decision not to speak is contradicted.

The movement of Rangjung Dorjé's place of birth is perhaps the most curious of these changes. It appears to arise from a combination of ambiguity in his phrasing and the fact that later commentators were not familiar with his birth region. In his writing, Rangjung Dorjé mentions several places in relation to his conception and birth. Chronologically, the first of these is Nyenam (modern-day Nyalam) in Latö;[66] in the *Verse Liberation Story*, he says his mother's womb was "just near" Nyenam.[67] Later, this same text states that the Karmapa in-between consciousness was encouraged to take rebirth by a vision of "the yogi Milarépa [standing] in the center of Latö's Pel[mo] Tang Plain."[68] This plain lies just to the northeast of Nyenam.

As this chapter discussed earlier, in his description of his conception in the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*, Rangjung Dorjé locates his parents in two places. His father is positioned in the Tsapu Valley, in the lower part of the Kyidrong Valley, which is down the valley from where Milarépa was born at Kyangtsama.[69] His mother, and, therefore, her womb, is positioned at "the base of Gang Zhurmo" in the next valley over from Kyidrong.[70] The valley at the base of Gang Zhurmo is called Ladeb. To this day, there is an oral tradition that Rangjung Dorjé was born in a valley called Ladeb, at the base of Gang Zhurmo, a sacred mountain that later came to be associated with the treasure revealer Garwang Dorjé (1640–1685).[71] Given the collaborating evidence in Rangjung Dorjé's own writing, there is no reason to disbelieve this tradition.

For later storytellers who were relying on his writing and did not have a detailed knowledge of the area, however, this dual positioning may not have been as confusing as it is for those with detailed knowledge (or modern maps) of the region;

they could have merely stated that he was born in South Latö. But there are several other ambiguous statements within the texts that dissuaded them from making even this more generalized and correct statement about his place of birth, and to move it several hundred kilometers to the east.

The first of these ambiguities is the expression that the *Verse Liberation Story* uses to describe his conception in Latö; it says he "grasped the birth method" (*skye ba'i tshul bzung*), phrasing that could refer to either conception and birth or just conception. Then, when the same text later describes his actual birth, it does not use a toponym, instead describing his place of birth in relation to one of its previous, prestigious inhabitants. It describes his place of birth as being: "near to where the *jetsün dampa* [*rje btsun dam pa*] lived." The first key word here is *jetsün*, a title meaning "venerable one" that is often used to describe Milarépa. The second keyword, *dampa*, which means "sacred," could be used here as a descriptor of Milarépa, and the sentence could mean "near to where the sacred *jetsun* lived," which is to say, Kyidrong.

This word *dampa* is also, however, part of the name of another revered southern Tibetan inhabitant, the Indian *siddha* Padampa Sanggyé. Rangjung Dorjé's father was a practitioner of the tradition Padampa Sanggyé established in Tibet, the Pacification lineage, and one of Rangjung Dorjé's early visions is set at his primary residence at Dingri Langkor.[72] On the basis of this association, many later commentators confidently stated that Rangjung Dorjé was born at Dingri Langkor, "near to where the venerable [Pa]dampa [Sanggyé] lived."[73] As Tsuklak Trengwa describes his birth:

> His mother and father traveled to near Dingri Langkor, where they stayed at his maternal aunt's house. [It was there] on the eighth night of the first month of the male wood monkey year [1284] that he was born on the building's roof, without harming his mother. As soon as he was born, he squatted, wiped his face with his hands, and looking at the moon said, "It is the eighth day of the month."
>
> His maternal aunt could not bear this. She said, "It is very wrong for a child to speak as soon as it is born!" His parents [quickly] left [the aunt's house]. From then on, he understood that beings of dark times are naturally stupid, and even though he could speak, walk, and do other things, he pretended he could not.[74]

Rangjung Dorjé only notes that he was "delighted" to see the moon, but Tsuklak Trengwa insists that even as a newborn he could judge the day of the month merely by looking at it. Here, once again, Tsuklak Trengwa's additions to the tale—like

his additions to the corpse-entry narrative—elaborate on the tension that already existed between Rangjung Dorjé's roles as a child and as a realized reincarnate.

Other changes that Tsuklak Trengwa and others made were aimed at bringing Rangjung Dorjé's story into line with the Buddha's birth story. The Buddha was said to have felt no pain in birth and to have caused no pain to his mother. Rangjung Dorjé claims that he did "not remember the pain of birth, but [his] faculties were not impaired, and [his] mind did not waver."[75] The later storytellers, once again led by Tsuklak Trengwa, intensified this claim in two ways: they read Rangjung Dorjé's claim not to remember any pain as a declaration that he felt no pain; and they extend this painlessness to his mother. If the Buddha's mother did not suffer in childbirth, Rangjung Dorjé's mother could not suffer in childbirth either.[76]

They also chose to ignore his parents' lowly social status. Rangjung Dorjé states plainly and repeatedly that he was the son of itinerant potters and reflects on the lowly status potters had in Tibetan society.[77] His description of his family background is substantiated by Orgyenpa's liberation story, which notes his parents' social position, and by two other early retellings of his tale: the *Lhorong Dharma History* and the *Red Annals*.[78] But Tsuklak Trengwa's version does not mention Rangjung Dorjé's lowly familial status, and later biographers tended to follow his lead.[79]

CHILDHOOD DREAMS AND OTHER OMENS

After describing his birth, the next stages of Rangjung Dorjé's story are all dedicated to establishing his special qualities. At this stage of the reincarnation tradition's development, there were even less narrative precursors for this element of his story than for the journey between lives. There were not even detailed records of the first two Karmapas' childhoods. Düsum Khyenpa's stories do not say anything about his childhood, and Karma Pakshi's tales only start to provide details when he meets Pomdrakpa in early adolescence.[80] The Buddha's early life was not a very helpful model in this instance either. The Buddha was born a royal prince and lived a life of luxury before renouncing it. There was virtually no common ground between his and Rangjung Dorjé's experiences.

Instead, Rangjung Dorjé's story pieces together fragmentary allusions to previous stories of gifted children with his own "dreamlike" memories. His ability to read and write at an early age (which Karma Pakshi could do too)[81] and his propensity to experience visions, for example, are described along with more personal qualities like his astute social observations, his skill in composition, and his ability to remember past lives.[82] Perhaps the most important ingredient in this mix, however, was his visions, which, according to his own recollections, he began

experiencing and describing at a very early age. Like most memories of this early period, these visions help to develop a sense that his humble outward life masked an intensely vivid inner life. He writes:

> This is the way I stayed until I was five years old. Outside I behaved and lived as a child, but inside I knew all appearances were dreamlike, and even my dreams arose as pure visions. One night, in particular, in a dream, [I saw] my own body sitting cross-legged in a crystal palace on a throne with a back curtain, from which shone out a five-colored light. [Another time, I flew] like a bird into the center of the sky. [In these visions] I could go everywhere. [At another time], multitudes of demigods came to make offerings and supplications to me.[83]

Against the background of what he claims was a consistently rich, spiritual life, he makes a point of mentioning the experiences he had in the two most significant temples in his region. The first experience occurred on a visit to the main temple at Dingri Langkor when he was four. This temple was dedicated to Padampa Sanggyé, and when Rangjung Dorjé visited, "rainbow colors appeared out of [Pa]dampa's statue before they dissolved into me. After that, my father taught me the Pacification [lineage of yoga]."[84]

Next, he visited the Āryavati Zangpo statue, which was housed in the Pakpa Lhakhang in Kyidrong near the present-day border of India and Nepal.[85] The young Rangjung Dorjé was said to have been inspired by the statue and "developed a vast happiness at the thought of helping others, the sacred compassion that holds all dear."[86]

As these stories tell it, a good deal of the attention Rangjung Dorjé received as a child came from his ability to articulate his visionary experiences. This was a development in the narratives of gifted children that was to become a trope in the life stories of later reincarnates. Another quality that Rangjung Dorjé was said to have is more unusual, however, and that is his song singing. Tsuklak Trengwa tells a well-known tale about him.

> One day, as a three-year-old, he was performing equanimity, when he asked for some black felt to be made into a hat. Then he put on this small, black hat, and seated on a throne of stones began introducing the other children to the three bodies. But before he did this, he recited [the following song]:
>
> This play of appearances is illusory;
> A trick of the eye, like a rainbow.

It appears true but is empty. I realize this, [and]
Have compassion for you children who do not.[87]

This incident is not included in his autobiography, and this song is not included in his collection of songs. But there is a song in his collection whose colophon claims he composed it as a five-year-old child. It reads in part:

Kye ma! Stormy waves of inevitable grasping
Arise from *saṃsāra's* ocean.
May the sun, the *samādhi* of
Great wisdom, dry them all up . . .

These are dark [times] for the Buddha's teachings:
*Dhārmika*s behave like Mongols,
Mountain folk come down to town,
Yogis do farm work, [and so-called]
Spiritual friends trick people . . .

Looking at lower views may constitute looking,
But if you are looking, why not look at the sūtras?
Offering obsequies at banquets may constitute an offering,
But if you are making an offering, why not make it to
the three jewels?
Teaching your entourage useless things may constitute teaching,
But if you are teaching, why not teach the sacred gurus' words?
Then at least the wealth and fame you achieve in this life
Will help you arouse experiences in the future![88]

This song is clearly a very sophisticated composition for a five-year-old. Even if, as is likely, the person who scribed it enhanced its phrasing, it still includes several image constructions and a level of social criticism that would be, to say the least, unusual for one this young. Its conceptual setting within the world of a religious teacher is also weird.

It may have been used to establish his specialness, but if it was, then it was not as successful as the other text that he is said to have composed as a child, the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*. Rangjung Dorjé's telling of this tale was considered so important to the development of his (and the larger Karmapa tradition's) reputation that most of it was included in several later versions of his liberation story, and Rangjung Dorjé even describes its composition in his own *Verse Liberation Story*. "The virtuous scholar Serkhangpa," he recalls, "asked me

some questions respectfully, and from my reply came the speech that is renowned as the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*."[89] Tsuklak Trengwa adds a lot more flesh to this skeletal narrative. His version reads:

> One day, when [Rangjung Dorjé's] father felt hungry and thirsty, he said: "Right, now we should travel to that village over there." This they did, and [when they arrived] his parents started enjoying themselves. [After a while], his father got drunk and was having such a good time, he started telling [people]: "The Karmapa Rinpoche has arrived." This news buzzed around the market, and [Rangjung Dorjé] received a pile of offerings that looked like a mountain. Everybody [there] wanted to receive his blessing and hear the dharma. Serkhangpa, who was a great bodhisattva, a guru, a spiritual friend of all in Latö, and was at that time presiding [over the village], asked [Rangjung Dorjé] detailed questions. Rangjung Dorjé's reply was the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*, which [this teacher] wrote down. [After Serkhangpa completed his scribing of the text], he bowed at [Rangjung Dorjé's] feet.[90]

The picture Tsuklak Trengwa paints here of Rangjung Dorjé's family fits with their description in Rangjung Dorjé's and Orgyenpa's writing. But this section of Rangjung Dorjé's life story departs from the general Karmapa script in many ways. The Karmapas, tradition insists, are installed in accordance with a letter from their predecessors—a process called "self-recognition"—by their chief lineal descendants. In this story, by contrast, the process of recognition is gradual; Rangjung Dorjé's lowly family makes public claims about their gifted child, and he starts developing a reputation. Then a local scholar named Serkhangpa[91] accepts their suggestion that he is Karma Pakshi's reincarnation. It is only then, with Serkhangpa's blessing, that they make the journey to meet the person whom later storytellers hold responsible for Rangjung Dorjé's recognition: the politically, socially, and spiritually powerful yogi, Orgyenpa.

ORGYENPA'S RECOGNITION

Perhaps part of the reason that the meeting with Orgyenpa became the moment on which later storytellers focused is that it undoubtedly changed Rangjung Dorjé's life. In his writing, Rangjung Dorjé describes Orgyenpa as his protector, his "father guru." Other writers describe their meeting as a poignant reunion between long-lost friends.

Orgyenpa's recognition of Rangjung Dorjé followed his earlier recognition of Künga Özer as the rebirth of his revered teacher Götsangpa and Künden Réma as the rebirth of Gotsangpa's consort Drowa Zangmo. But his recognition of Rangjung Dorjé as Karma Pakshi's rebirth had higher stakes. Rangjung Dorjé was Tibet's first third-generation reincarnation. By recognizing him, Orgyenpa was not only acknowledging his personal attributes, but he had also acknowledged a continuing rebirth pattern. What is more, he was asserting that the great Karma Pakshi, guru to emperors and head of several monasteries, had been reborn as the son of an itinerant potter. To convince people of this, Orgyenpa's and Rangjung Dorjé's telling of the tale focuses on two narrative elements: Orgyenpa's close relationship with Karma Pakshi and the fact that he had his black hat.

Fortunately, although neither Karma Pakshi's life stories nor Rangjung Dorjé's liberation stories describe the relationship between Karmapa and Orgyenpa, Orgyenpa's liberation story—composed by one of his students—does, in colorful detail.

> When [Orgyenpa] arrived at Tsurpu's upper pastures, an unimaginable number of monks stood in line [to greet him] and played music [to mark his arrival]. The crowd of lay people trying to receive [the Karmapa's] blessing was so large that the whole area was congested, and the path was blocked. No one could control the [crowds]. Then, from out of this group, emerged fifty men from Kham, who said [to Orgyenpa], "Today we will be the precious Mahāsiddha's [Orgyenpa's] bodyguard." Then they used their sticks to create a path for Orgyenpa [through the crowd], [leading him to] a large yak-hair tent . . . [This was the Karmapa's tent, and Orgyenpa and his students went inside to meet him.]
>
> [When they came into his presence] the great, precious Karmapa said, "Ah! Siddha Orgyenpa! You were supposed to get here three days ago, and you only arrive now? The food [we had for you] has gone bad!"
>
> The precious Mahāsiddha replied [jokingly], "The reason I did not arrive sooner is that I am a practitioner of the Drugpa Kagyü's reverse training [*zlog sgom*]." The precious Karmapa replied, "When you practice reverse training, you are putting shit in your mouth and molasses in your ass!" and many other such gibberish things . . .
>
> Then Mahāsiddha's attendants saw the wondrous statues, *stūpas*, and texts in the Karmapa's abode, and [their reaction caused] the Karmapa to say, "The Mahāsiddha Orgyenpa's students' mouths have frozen! What are you staring at? If you want to stare at something, stare at your guru's face!"

> [After saying this] he took the black silk hat he was wearing on his own head, placed it on the precious Mahāsiddha's head, and told him he would grant him the empowerment of Avalokiteśvara Jinasāgara. Then he filled up a bowl with barley, stirred it with an iron [rod], and placed the bowl on [Orgyenpa's] head while handing him the iron rod. [Orgyenpa asked, again jokingly], "Does someone in your lineage wear a black hat?"
>
> [Karma Pakshi replied], "The snowy one [the white-haired Karmapa, himself] is unstable,[92] and in dependence on this sense-sphere [his body] the lineage of black-hat holders will be cut. But then from sunny Latö, a black-hatted one will return."
>
> [Later], when he introduced [Orgyenpa] to the three bodies [of a buddha] he stared [out into space] in amazement. Then he said, "We two have been each other's masters so many times. [In the future], you will have to guide me. Your disciple [the next Karmapa] will be in the sunny south. For the sake of wanderers, you will have to lead him through Jinasāgara, the six syllables that are its essence, and the introduction to the three bodies."[93]

This narrative contains many of the elements that helped make the transition from the second to third Karmapas a success. It is set, for example, at the Karmapas' seat, Tsurpu, and mentions both the famous name that could be passed on from reincarnation to reincarnation and its symbol, the black hat. By entrusting the black hat to Orgyenpa and asking him to be his future teacher, Karma Pakshi establishes him as the informal regent for the Karmapa body rosary. Moreover, this transference of authority is conducted through an empowerment into the deity most associated with the second and third Karmapas, Avalokiteśvara Jinasāgara. This is the form of Avalokiteśvara that Rangjung Dorjé expresses the most confidence in when he muses on his possible future achievements at the start of the *Verse Liberation Story*. Orgyenpa is transformed into this deity through this empowerment, and the ritual of barley-stirring suggests the joining of mindstreams. Orgyenpa is, therefore, in a perfect position to reempower the next young Karmapa in his future life.

Karma Pakshi also makes two predictions in this narrative: that his rebirth will be in "sunny Latö," in the "sunny south," and Orgyenpa will "have to guide" him. This is the first example of a prophecy being made by a dying Karmapa that would then be fulfilled by the next. It was most probably this prophecy to which Rangjung Dorjé was referring when in his *Verse Liberation Story*, he said his birth was "accordance with prophecy."[94] While it should be pointed out that the text containing this prophecy was composed after Rangjung Dorjé's recognition, its narrative import in the development of the Karmapa project was nevertheless

profound. From this point onward, prophecies would be demanded from dying Karmapas, and their rebirths would need to fit with their sometimes-obscure pronouncements.

All that was needed to close the circle of this narrative was for the two beings to be reunited following Rangjung Dorjé's birth. Although the *Verse Liberation Story* contains a brief description of the initial meeting between the young Rangjung Dorjé and Orgyenpa,[95] again the most comprehensive and conversational retelling of this encounter is found in Orgyenpa's liberation story. Picking up on some of the imagery that was introduced in their previous-life meeting, it reads:

> One morning [Orgyenpa] got up very early and said, "Last night I dreamt I met the precious Karmapa." Later [that morning] a monk named Sungsé arrived from Mopuk with an attendant. When he met [Orgyenpa] he said, "We arrived last night from Mukhug[96] at the same time as a potter, his wife, and their son. They think their boy is the Karmapa, and [want to ask you] if he really is. They are staying in a hut at the base of the monastery." The great Mahāsiddha replied, "It could be, but for now we should keep this possibility to ourselves."
>
> An attendant was sent to invite them [to the monastery], and [as he left] the precious Mahāsiddha said, "Make a high throne: if it is the Karmapa, he will not fear to sit on it." So [his attendants] made up a high throne, and brought everyone together. When the community had gathered, they burned incense and greeted [each other]. This meant that when the boy arrived, he only came into [Orgyenpa's] presence gradually [moving through the crowd]. When [Orgyenpa] finally saw him, he said, "I wonder, are you the Karmapa?"
>
> The boy replied, "I am the one renowned as the Karmapa." Then he raised his right hand, [hooked] his small sleeve [on the throne], and pulled himself up by it, [climbing] onto the arranged throne. [Once up there] he said, "I taught you the dharma, now you need to teach me. Oh, and in my past life, didn't I give you some things? Didn't I give you my hat?"
>
> The Mahāsiddha replied, "[What you say] is true. It is in my room." [Then, to his attendants, he said], "Someone go and get it." An attendant went and retrieved it, and when the precious Karmapa [who was a child] placed his previous life's [large] hat on his [small] head, everybody laughed.[97]

Despite its conversational style, this story contains two important symbols: it puts the black hat on Rangjung Dorjé's head and calls him the Karmapa. It also describes Orgyenpa's agreement to fulfill the promise he had made to Karma Pakshi. In describing Rangjung Dorjé climbing onto a teaching throne as a test of

his fortitude, it both evokes old images of royal power and sets a precedent for the later tradition of enthronement. What is more, by allowing the audience to giggle at the incongruence of the child-as-guru, it neutralizes the possibly problematic image of a child-as-guru. The later tradition would reuse all these useful tropes.

ROUND TRIP

The story also highlights the multiple social relationships that allowed the Karmapas' continuing recognition. And from among its wider cast, Orgyenpa has a starring role. Orgyenpa recognized Rangjung Dorje, the potter's son as the rebirth of Orgyenpa's deceased teacher. Reflecting on this in his *Liberation Story in Verse*, Rangjung Dorje remembered that, "This great being, [Orgyenpa] nurtured me like I was his beloved son."[98]

The reference to family here is telling because Rangjung Dorjé's recognition by Orgyenpa is also the last mention of his own family in his liberation stories. Unlike many other families associated with recognized reincarnates, his family all but drops out of the historical record; his parents do not visit him again, and no distant cousin is recognized as his rebirth.[99] Instead, Rangjung Dorjé enters into Orgyenpa's world—a world that had been extended through the elder yogi's travels to the holy land of India and through his political connections to the Mongol court. These connections proved a blessing and a curse for Orgyenpa, who was caught up in political machinations soon after Rangjung Dorjé's arrival at his hermitage and was forced to travel to the Mongol capitals.

These upheavals also affected Rangjung Dorjé, who found himself transported once again, this time to the Karmapas' seat of Tsurpu, which was still very much under the control of Karma Pakshi's family. To establish his position as the reembodied Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé, a potter's biological son and now Orgyenpa's spiritual son, he would need to negotiate directly with this family, and the traditions they represented.

NOTES

1. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 16.2–3, and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 198.3–4.

2. As Berounský has noted, this is one of only two such narratives to come to light in Tibetan literature. The other is about the Dalai Lama's journey between his fifth and sixth lives: Berounský, "Entering Dead Bodies, Part 1," 8.

3. Manson gives an overview of these dates: "Elastic Time, Magical Memories," 44. They can also be found individually in Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 238; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 94; and 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. *nya*, 37a.

4. Dpal mo thang Plain is the place in Tibet where Padmasambhava subdued the twelve local goddesses, who will be introduced shortly. It is a high plain lying between Mount Shi sha spang and Lake Pal khu. See Diemberger *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty,* 344 n. 28. Mar pa and Mi la ras pa's life stories also set events there.

5. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 375.

6. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 358.

7. Both Berounský and Seegers have also noted this link. See Berounský, "Entering Dead Bodies, Part 1," 30; Berounský, "Entering Dead Bodies, Part 2," 7; Seegers, "Lord of the Teachings," 53, 80n226, 83n241, 112–113.

8. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 366–367.

9. Tib. *chos'phrul bsam gyis mi khyab pa byung*.

10. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 358.

11. Other writers had suggested that the "missing" *Liberation Story of the In-Between State* may be the source of the "entering the residence" story: Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 44–45; Seegers, "Lord of the Teachings,"48, 72, 79–81; and Berounský, "Entering Dead Bodies, Part 2," 25. For a description of this text see the appendix.

12. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 377.

13. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 95.

14. Berounský gives a list of seven stories that include an "entrance into another body" account: Berounský, "Entering Dead Bodies, Part 2," 10–13. Four of these occur before Dar ma mdo sde's era, and another occurs within a fictional story. The only one that occurs after Dar ma mdo sde's story is found in a liberation story from the seventeenth century, that of the Dge lugs teacher Stong 'khor rgyal ba rgya mtsho (1588–1639).

15. Roberts, *Mahāmudrā and Related Instructions*, 9.

16. This story is widely known thanks to its inclusion in Gtsang smyon He ru ka's version of Mi la ras pa's liberation story, *Rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug chen po Mi la ras pa'i rnam mgur* (Delhi: Sherig Parkhang, 1990), 222–225. But as Roberts has shown, the link between Dar ma mdo sde and Tipupa is not found in early versions of Marpa's story, *The Biographies of Réchungpa*, 125–126.

17. Roberts, *Mahāmudrā and Related Instructions*, 9.

18. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 919.

19. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 377–378.

20. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 359.

21. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 359.

22. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 359.

23. Barbara Gerke has described the role of *bla* in Tibetan culture and medicine in detail:"Engaging the Subtle Body: Re-approaching *bla* rituals among Himalayan Tibetan Societies," in *Soundings in Tibetan Medicine: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mona Schrempf (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 195.

24. Gerke, "Engaging the Subtle Body," 200–201.

25. In Tibetan, the name of these five are (1) Rdo rje thog 'bebs ma, (2) Rdo rje dpal 'bar ma, (3) Rdo rje stobs mo che, (4) Rdo rje mthu rgyal ma, and (5) Rdo rje dung sgra ma.

26. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 39–40; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 215–216.

27. Powers, *Bull of a Man*, 24–65, describes Indian monastic masculinity discourses.

28. Tib. *Tag sha dung gi rdo rje sgo mo che*. Bstan 'dzin rnam dag describes a gate called "Dag-sha Conch Gate" (*'Dag sha dung gi sgo*), in *Rgyal gzhen rnam thar* (Lhun grub steng [Lundrup Teng], Sichuan: Sde dge par khang, 2010), 888. Dan Martin also mentions this gate

in "Ol-mo-lung-ring, the Original Holy Place," in *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places in Tibetan Culture: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Toni Huber (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1999) 291 n. 33. Another gate is called *Gha gha rdo rje ral gri ma*. Gha gha is sometimes used as an alternate name for the Tangut Kingdom or Western Xia.

29. René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz describes the "twelve locality spirits" tradition in some depth in *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: the Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (New Delhi: Book Faith India, 1996), 181–198.

30. Here they are called the "four dharma protectors."

31. Gtsang smyon He ru ka, *Mi la ras pa'i rnam mgur*, 451–520.

32. In Tibetan, the term *ḍākinī* was translated as *mkha' 'gro*, "traveler in space or sky." Rang byung rdo rje makes repeated word plays in his poetry based on this designation.

33. As Geoff Childs noted, during this period the idea of hidden lands was nascent but mainly associated with the kingdom of Mangyül Gungtang, the region where Rangjung Dorjé was born: Childs, "Refuge and Revitalization: Hidden Himalayan Sancturies (*Sbas-yul*) and the Preservation of Tibet's Imperial Lineage," *Acta Orientalia* 60 (1999): 126–158. The reference might, therefore, have had a particular resonance with Rangjung Dorjé's local audience.

34. Tib. *nged kyis khyed te ma khul na. rogs kyang mang du sbran no skad. rogs ci ltar sbron bgyis pas.* The word *khul* may be related to the verb *skul ba* and mean "to encourage, to urge." I thank one of the anonymous reviewers of my book for this information.

35. The names of the protectors of the four hidden lands in Tibetan are (1) Vajra-satri, (2) Rdo rje bu skyong li btsun, (3) Rdo rje phu chu sman gcig ma, and (4) Rdo rje g.yu chung ma.

36. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 360–361.

37. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 361.

38. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 363.

39. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 364–365.

40. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 365–366. The translation of the last two lines follows Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 922–923, which reads *lho ri dmar smug mdangs gsal ba. byang ri dkar po'i mdog ldan na.* In *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 366, they read *lho ri smug la dmar ba'i mdangs chags pa. byang ri dkar la dmar ba'i mdangs dang ldan pa.* Scribal errors in the latter text create two shades of pink.

41. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar*, 375.

42. The central channel is called *avadhūti* in Sanskrit (Tib. *dbu ma*), and the wheel is called *cakra* (Tib. *'khor lo*). The right-hand channel is called *lalanā* (Tib. *rkyang ma*), and the left-hand channel is called *rasanā* (Tib. *ro ma*). Bindu is called *thig le* in Tibetan. This is also the colloquial Tibetan word for sperm.

43. Frances Garrett, *Religion, Medicine, and the Human Embryo in Tibet* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 66.

44. *Zab mo nang gi don*, in vol. *ja* of *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, 308–360.

45. This refers to a Tibetan place name, 'Om lung, as opposed to the Indic syllable OṂ. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar*, 375.

46. Franz-Karl Erhard, *Die Statue und der Tempel des Arya Va-ti bzang-po: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Geographie des Tibetischen Buddhismus* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004), 122, 289, 438–440.

47. Berounský, "Entering Dead Bodies, Part 1," 28. Curiously, Berounský associates the mountains with the *bindu* of two colors but does not draw any other parallels between the geography of the region and the tantric and medical descriptions of conception. Diemberger

has written about the importance of red and white life substances to the social and cultural geography of a nearby region: "Blood, Sperm, Soul, and the Mountain."

48. Berounský reads the Tibetan phrase used here, *ma dgod 'dod lus kyi sgrom bu*, to mean that the body was "unneeded" or "redundant": "Entering Dead Bodies, Part 1," 28. This makes less sense to me than the idea that they were undesired, as desiring form is a fundamental aspect of becoming in the Buddhist tradition.

49. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 366.

50. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 366.

51. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar*, 378.

52. Robert Kritzer discusses Vasubandhu's description of the in-between state: "The Four Ways of Entering the Womb (*Garbhavakranti*)," *Bukkyi Bunka* 10 (2000): 10.

53. Sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen, *Lha rje Bsod nams rin chen gyi mdza' ba'i thar pa rin po che'i rgyan* (New Delhi: Siddhartha's Intent, 2000), 74–80. The second section of the *Profound Inner Meaning* gives an overview of a body's development in the womb too: Rang byung rdo rje, *Zab mo nang gi don*, 308–360. These texts approach this space from the point of view of its inhabitant, the fetus, not the mother. As Robert Kritzer pointed out in relation to Abhidharma literature, the approach to women's bodies in these texts pays no regard to women's personhood: "Childbirth and the Mother's Body in the *Abhidharmakośabhāśya* and Related Texts," in *Indo tetsugaku bukkyō shisō ron shū: Mikogami Eshō kyōju shōju kinen ronshū* (Kyoto: Nagatabunshodō, 2004).

54. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar*, 377.

55. Kritzer discusses Vasubandhu's description of these various capacities in the in-between state in "The Four Ways of Entering the Womb,"10.

56. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 918.

57. Descriptions of meetings between these two people that do not contain this conversation can be found in *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 368; *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 380; and Bsod nams 'od zer, *O rgyan pa'i rnam par*, 248–249.

58. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 918.

59. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 97.7–98.1; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 262.4. It is called the *Song That Determines the Ground-of-All.* This song has also been translated by Brunnhölzl, *Luminous Heart*, 201; Schaeffer, "The Enlightened Heart of Buddhahood," 174; and Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within*, 74.

60. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 399–402.

61. This is a short form of *mngon par rdzogs par byang chub lnga* (Skt. *pañca-abhisaṃbodhi*).

62. Stephen Hodge, *Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra with Buddhaguhya's Commentary* (London: Routledge, 2003), 465.

63. As these claims directly contradict Rang byung rdo rje's statements and are not found in the early versions of the story, the question then becomes, from where was this, the largest unsourced section of later narratives, derived? An answer may be found in the list of nonextant texts listed at the beginning of the *Mgur 'bum*, vol. *ka*, 42. In this list, there is a text descriptively titled *Rin po che rang 'byung rdo rje dgung lo drug bzhes pa'i dus su La stod Pu trar bla ma U rgyan pa'i drung du gsung pa'i rnam thar* (*Liberation Story That Details What the Precious One Rang byung rdo rje Said in Bu tra, La tö to Guru O rgyan pa When He Was Six Years Old*). But neither Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 946, nor Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 401, include a text with this name in their lists of sources for Rang byung rdo rje's liberation story. The text's name suggests that it may have been extracted from Gtsug lag phreng ba's composition rather than inserted into it.

64. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 927.

65. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 379.

66. There is a pilgrimage site here associated with Mi la ras pa.

67. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 378.

68. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 379.

69. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 366.

70. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 366.

71. Franz-Karl Ehrhard, *Buddhism in Tibet and the Himalayas. Texts and Traditions* (Kathmandu: Vajra, 2013), 323.

72. Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong chos 'byung*, 239; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 95; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 923; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 356.

73. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 924; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 356. There may be a clue to how this passage changed in the repackaged version of the *Tshigs bcad ma* found in Mkha' spyod dbang po's *Gsung 'bum*. There, the crucial sentence reads, "I was born in that place, near where the *Rje btsun bla ma* resided": Mkha' spyod dbang po, *Rang byung rdo rje'i rnam thar tshigs bcad ma*, 127. This one word change omits any mention of Pha dam pa sangs gyas. Another possible reading of the line is that Rang byung rdo rje is referring to a lesser-known tradition that Pha dam pa sangs gye conducted at: a retreat at Gangs zhur mo. See Erhard, *Die Statue und der Tempel*, 439.

74. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 924.

75. This comment is made in *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 379. It is not included in Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 924.

76. This change of perspective from the reporting of Rang byung rdo rje's experiences to those of his mother does not provide any detail of her experience; rather, it very directly follows the tropes associated with the birthing of realized beings in the Buddhist tradition.

77. The role of potters on the Plateau is described in Baidyanath Saraswati, "Pottery Manufacture in Ladakh," *Bulletin of the Anthropological Survey of India* 2 (1967): 69–76.

78. Bsod nams 'od zer says a potter, his wife, and child come to visit O rgyan pa: *O rgyan pa'i rnam par thar*, 248. Tshe dbang rgyal says his father "was a bodhisattva from the market caste" (*khrom pa'i rigs*): *Lho rong*, 238. Kun dga' rdo rje says his father pursued a "modest livelihood": *Deb ther dmar* po, 96.

79. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 923; Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 356.

80. Rgwa Lo tsā ba, *Ser gling*, 37–38; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 235. This skip in narrative is also described in Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 31.

81. Schaeffer remarks on the general importance of learning reading and writing at a young age by saying, "Like reading, scribal work could be taken as a sign of intellectual mastery gained over the course of lifetimes": Schaeffer, *The Culture of the Book*, 7.

82. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 2, 96; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 927; Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 356.

83. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 379–380.

84. In the text, it says that he was five years old, but as Tibetans describe newborn children as being one year old, I have deducted this year from his age.

85. Discussed in Peter Aufschaiter's pre-1959 survey of the area, "Land and Places of Milarepa," *East and West* 26 (1976): 175–189. The statue is also described in depth in Erhard, *Die Statue und der Tempel*. It was carried into exile and is now housed in the Dalai Lama's compound in Dharamsala, India.

86. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 379–380. In subsequent retellings of this tale, the association between this statue of Avalokiteśvara and the belief that Rang byung rdo rje is Avalokiteśvara's emanation is emphasized: Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 926; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 358.

87. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 924.

88. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 170–171; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 388–390.

89. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 380.

90. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 925.

91. Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 45n84, following Sørensen, Hazod, Tsering, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain*, 105n131, has suggested Gser khang pa was known as Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1223–1292) who was the "8th holder of the abbatial throne of Tshal (and) Gung-thang." Although this is possible, it seems unlikely. Why was the abbot of Tshal Monastery presiding over a village in La stod when Tshal's myriarch, Dga' dbe dpal—who as we will meet in the next chapter—was under arrest in Dadu (Beijing)? A more viable alterative is a monk, fleetingly mentioned in the *Blue Annals,* whose name is "the great scholar/abbot" (Mkhan chen) Gser khang pa. This scholar is said to have granted ordination to Dpal ldan seng ge ba (thirteenth century), who was born in La stod and met O gyan pa as a child: see 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. *nya*, 15a.

92. The expression here is strange; it reads *gya ba gangs pa'i gyu ba byas*. As near as I can gather, this is written in Khams pa dialect and suggests that Karma Pakshi is calling himself "the snowy one" on account of his age.

93. Bsod nams 'od zer, *O rgyan pa'i rnam thar*, 197–200.

94. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 379.

95. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 380–381.

96. I have not been able to identify a Mo phug or Mu khug in Lho stod.

97. Bsod nams 'od zer, *O rgyan pa'i rnam thar*, 248–249.

98. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 381.

99. The only exception to this, as I noted in chapter 2, note 13, was Si tu paṇ chen's reference to one of his grand-nephews.

6

From Latö to Tsurpu

When you practice the sacred dharma,
Do not be attached to country or kin;
Watch your mind incisively.

When you are in *saṃsāra*'s miserable ocean,
Do not think, "It's okay here";
Be homeless, wander the mountains.

Rangjung Dorjé, aged between twelve and sixteen,
Khyung Dzong Hermitage, Tsurpu[1]

When Rangjung Dorjé lived in it, Khyung Dzong Hermitage (the Garuḍa Fortress Hermitage) was a cluster of small stone and rammed-earth buildings on the mountainside above Tsurpu Monastery. Next to it, grassy stumps grew out of precarious dirt pools between large boulders that regularly clustered into cliffs. Were it not for Khyung Dzong's yogi colony, this site would have remained the sole domain of the argali goats that clambered around it.

Looking out through the small windows of the hermitage, Rangjung Dorjé would have seen snowy mountains in all directions and heard a river cascading through alpine meadows in the valley below. Between Khyung Dzong and the river, he would have seen the more comfortable, fortified buildings of Tsurpu Monastery, which had easier access to water and the produce that could be brought up from the lower parts of the Tölung Valley.

But it was in Khyung Dzong, in the land of goats, and not the central buildings of Tsurpu that Rangjung Dorjé spent most of his adolescence studying and practicing

yoga. He had arrived at Tölung Valley as a seven-year-old in 1290. Tensions in South Latö were still high following the Drigung Monastery uprising of 1290, and his teacher Orgyenpa had to travel to the Mongol capitals. The songs he composed while at Khyung Dzong suggest he thought he would be returning to Orgyenpa soon, but he never saw him again.

The isolation he describes in his poems was caused not only by Orgyenpa's absence but also his precarious status at Tsurpu. Karma Pakshi's family was in charge at Tsurpu, and although they let him stay, they did not always welcome him. Rangjung Dorjé went into retreat as a child, and he spent much of the next ten years living in the huts at Khyung Dzong, studying and conducting retreats. The primary foci of both these endeavors were the twin pillars of the Kagyü lineage: Nāropā's six dharmas and *mahāmudrā*. His stories and songs make claims for his developing proficiency in both practices by describing a series of visions he experienced. The most frequent presences in these visions are two protector deities, Black Coat and Remati, who are linked closely with both Tsurpu and the Karmapa rebirth lineage.

During this period, he also experienced a vision of the Indian *mahāsiddha* Saraha, a vision that included a poetic exchange. This song is the first in his *Collected Songs*. His collected songs also include a series of songs that he composed in Khyung Dzong between 1296 and 1300, when he was twelve to sixteen years old.[2] These songs reflect his life in Khyung Dzong. They describe its environment, the subjects he is studying, and his efforts to grapple with his identity. One of their major themes, which again reflects Saraha's influence on his writing, is the irony of composing songs about the "inexpressible" *mahāmudrā*. The other theme in his writing during this time is reminiscence about his past lives. While at Khyung Dzong, he wrote a song about his past lives as well as the *Liberation Story of Past Lives*.

In stark contrast to the playfulness that he brings to these subjects, his writing from this period also reflects a melancholy theme that would reoccur in the writing of other reincarnates: loneliness. In the main, this theme is expressed through the traditional Tibetan Buddhist proclamations of "remembering the guru." But Rangjung Dorjé also composed a new form of lament, specific to reincarnate children; he wrote songs full of doubts that he could meet the expectations of his gurus and followers.

At the end of his stay at Tsurpu, in his late teens, he took several short journeys to complete his education. The first was to the nearby Nye Valley, where he took full ordination at Gendün Gang Monastery. Then he conducted a short retreat at Mount Jomo Gangkar, in the Nyenchen Tanglha Range behind Tsurpu. And before he left central Tibet, he followed Düsum Khyenpa's example and went to stay at the famous Sangpu Neutok Monastery, where he pursued intensive philosophical

studies. It was the start of the itinerant regimen that he would continue for the rest of his life.

LEAVING LATÖ, LEAVING HOME

By all accounts, and particularly his own, the young Rangjung Dorjé was happy at Bütra Hermitage before this journey began, and more importantly he had developed a "strong attachment" to his "father guru," Orgyenpa. Orgyenpa and his associates had also helped strengthen the links between Rangjung Dorjé and his predecessor Karma Pakshi. When Künden Sherap (twelfth century) of Tropu Monastery ordained him as a novice monk, for example, he gave him Karma Pakshi's secret tantric name: Rangjung Dorjé.[3] No record remains of what he was called before this. Orgyenpa also set about fulfilling his promise to Karma Pakshi by first training Rangjung Dorjé in the practice of Jinasāgara, the form of Avalokiteśvara with which the Karmapas were becoming associated.[4] But unfortunately for Rangjung Dorjé, politics intervened before he could finish his education with Orgyenpa.

Rangjung Dorjé's liberation stories only mention his fraught situation in South Latö obliquely; he seems to assume his audience will know what he is talking about. It is, therefore, only when his story is compared with the histories of this period and the detailed record of events in Orgyenpa's liberation story that this part of his tale makes sense.

In the later versions of Rangjung Dorjé's biography, his return to Tsurpu at an early age is portrayed as inevitable. It is what Karmapas do: they return to Tsurpu, where they are enthroned and begin their education. But during Rangjung Dorjé's childhood, this precedent was far from established. The only vaguely applicable parallel for his journey to Tsurpu was Karma Pakshi's "return" there, and he arrived at Tsurpu in his thirties to restore a ruin.[5] Rangjung Dorjé's return was neither a triumphant procession nor part of a rehabilitation project. He traveled to Tsurpu as a refugee.

As chapter 3 noted, the political troubles that plagued Rangjung Dorjé's childhood began before his birth when the Chagadai Khanate and their Drigung allies lined up against Qubilai Khan and his Sakya allies. Despite a reluctance to talk about political events in his early songs, Rangjung Dorjé did reflect on his precarious situation later in life, when brokering a peace in eastern Tibet.

> As payback for discursive thoughts,
> I was born here in the north, at the foot of a snow mountain,

In these dark times for the Buddha's teachings,
Among quarrelsome beings.[6]

Although Orgyenpa provided protection for Rangjung Dorjé at this time, his open disdain for all sides of the conflict also made him—and those under his protection—a target. By the time Rangjung Dorjé came to stay with him, Orgyenpa had already survived a bruising encounter with the Sakya great lord, Künga Zangpo, during which many of his followers were killed and Bütra Hermitage was razed. His new friends Chögyel Pakpa and the Mongol prince Auruyci had helped him rebuild Bütra, but even after this he reprimanded Chögyel Pakpa for spending too much time at the Mongol court.[7] Later, he whipped Qubilai Khan's emissary Thogmi Temür in public, and rejected the summons to court that the emissary carried with him.[8] He was even less friendly with the Drigung and Chagadai, having performed ceremonies to expel their invasion in the late 1260s.[9] And when the Drigung rose in rebellion in 1290, neither side trusted him.

The rebellion began when Drigung partisans burned down Jayül Monastery, but with the help of the Upper Mongols, the Chagadai Khanate—which was at that stage co-ruled by Qaidu and a distant relative of his called Du'a (d. 1306)—it quickly spread beyond that site.[10] While Drigung and their allies fought in central Tibet, Qaidu and Du'a dispatched a large force, headed by Prince Rinchen, through western Tibet to South Latö. According to Orgyenpa's liberation story, so many Upper Mongol (Chagadai) troops invaded Latö that he had to surrender to them immediately. Still, he refused them aid or men to fight against the Sakya and Qubilai.[11]

Unfortunately for Orgyenpa, this was not a war that allowed this kind of disdainful neutrality. As Brenda Li reported in her study of Orgyenpa's liberation story, things began to go bad when his niece (or grand-niece), whom Orgyenpa described as a "wicked woman," "betrayed him and collaborated with (Prince) Rinchen."[12] At the same time, other members of his family formed a militia to fight against Rinchen and viewed Orgyenpa's surrender to him as treachery. One of the militia groups was centered on a clan called the Tsadawa, who were related to Orgyenpa by marriage.[13] The precariousness of his and, therefore, Rangjung Dorjé's situation is expressed through a vignette that appears in Situ Paṇchen's retelling of Rangjung Dorjé's liberation story. It reads:

One night, when they had set off for Khakyu Pass, [Rangjung Dorjé] had a clear visionary [dream]. Above him, he saw twenty-one small-shields. The next morning, he asked his guru if it was a good dream.

[Orgyenpa replied] that if this had been [his vision], they should wait [to see if the shield bearers were] Tsadawa [or not]. He also said, "We will gather

troops," but they only [managed to find] thirteen small-shield [bearers]. [This suggested that Rangjung Dorjé's vision had not been of their troops]. Then, when these gathered chiefs and their attendants were about to leave, everyone saw [other] shield-bearers on the pass.[14] Their presence meant that [Orgyenpa's soldiers] did not dare to cross the pass, and stayed where they were. Instead, they sent a messenger to the [shield bearers on the hill], to see if they were Tsadawa. [Orgyenpa] then said that [if they received a signal that] they were [Tsadawa], all those who could flee should flee. If not, and the messenger [merely] waved down at them, they should proceed upward [toward the pass].

When the messenger arrived at the pass, he waved, and they all proceeded up toward it. After that, they were able to cross the pass secretly. Nevertheless, [following this incident, Orgyenpa] told [Rangjung Dorjé] not to tell others about his clairvoyance as it could create obstacles. The guru made him promise this.[15]

Although it does not appear in earlier works, there are many reasons to suggest this story was older than many of the other interpolations in his narrative. It contains verifiable historical details and none of the technical language of most other interpolations. Its presentation of Rangjung Dorjé is also telling; rather than an all-knowing buddha, he is merely presented as a yogi with clairvoyance, a relatively minor ability in Tibetan lore. All these characteristics together suggest that it is a quite old tale.

Things did not seem to get any better for Orgyenpa and Rangjung Dorjé after the rebellion was put down by Qubilai Khan's grandson, Temür Boqa. When the Drigung and Chagadai were defeated, the great lord of Sakya Monastery, Aglen, chased the Drigung abbot all the way to Kongpo on Tibet's southern border and replaced Chagadai rule in Latö with direct Sakya rule. But from the Sakya's perspective, Orgyenpa's surrender to the Chagadai had been a betrayal, and they set about punishing him and his entourage. Finally, as Li describes it, Orgyenpa had to travel "naked to the barracks of Temür Boqa, where he succeeded in defending himself and gaining the trust of the latter. And even then, the Sakya authority remained hostile towards him."[16] As Roberto Vitali suggested, this difficult position might have been part of the reason why he finally chose to accept the next emissary from Qubilai Khan and travel to Dadu.[17]

From Orgyenpa's point of view, there was a silver lining to all this upheaval, however, and it was one that might even have aided his protégé's journey to Tsurpu. After the uprising, an old antagonist of his, the eighth Tsel myriarch, Gawé Pel (thirteenth century) was arrested along with the rebels and sent to Dadu. Gawé

Pel was Künga Zangpo's friend and had been creating trouble for Orgyenpa for a long time. Lately, he had also conspired with the emissary Orgyenpa had whipped, Thogmi Temür, to castigate and humiliate Orgyenpa in front of a large crowd in Lhasa.[18] This antagonism might have encouraged Gawé Pel to block Rangjung Dorjé's journey to Tsurpu, which was still under the control of Tsel Monastery, but his arrest and deportation removed this obstacle.

THE RETURN

Perhaps diplomatically or perhaps dismissively, Rangjung Dorjé's autobiography does not mention these machinations. Instead, like many of the episodes in his liberation stories, his remembrance of his stay with Orgyenpa and his journey to Tsurpu focus on his visions and his teacher's kindness. From this perspective, his decision to travel to Tsurpu is not described as a political necessity but rather as the result of a series of invitations and instructions he received from his gurus and guardian deities. These gurus and deities, Rangjung Dorjé insisted, were the real authorities in both the Tölung Valley and his life, not the various levels of the Mongol Imperium with whom he was would only negotiate reluctantly.

In contrast to the machinations of his local worldly rulers, he describes his invitations to Tsurpu, like the invitations that led to his birth, in great detail. The episode began when a Tsurpu-based yogi named Lama Nyenré ("the cotton-clad guru from Nyen") experienced a vision of Avalokiteśvara, who insisted he visit his teacher Karma Pakshi's reincarnation in South Latö.[19] Lama Nyenré formed a bond with the young Rangjung Dorjé during that visit, but there was no need for the boy to leave Orgyenpa and travel to Tsurpu at this time. Then, after the Drigung uprising, Rangjung Dorjé himself experienced a vision indicating he should travel to Tsurpu. In this vision, the two protector deities, Black Coat and the *nāga* king known as Khanak, Lord of Mantra, tell him forcefully that it is time to go.[20]

The appearance of these two particular protectors in the narrative is not a coincidence. Black Coat—the personal protector of the Karmapas and Tsurpu—authorizes Rangjung Dorjé's arrival at his destination. The *nāga* king Khanak, who is in charge of all the rivers that may block his way between South Latö and Tsurpu, authorizes his journey there. After receiving their instruction, Rangjung Dorjé contends, the only problems he encountered on the trip were caused by pesky local deities, whom he was able to dispatch deftly using a Vajrapāṇi yoga that Orgyenpa had taught him. Vajrapāṇi, the original Buddhist protector, who often stands beside Śākyamuni Buddha, is said to control all elemental spirits.[21]

According to later accounts, the first thing he did on his return to the Tölung Valley was visit the mother of the corpse he briefly inhabited and gift her a *dzo* (a cross between a cow and a yak). While there, these storytellers say, he asked her why she poked him in the eye with a needle. "It was not a needle," she replied, "it was just dirt."[22]

After this visit, he continued up the Tölung Valley to Tsurpu Monastery. His initial welcome was positive. Lama Nyenré, not only greeted the young boy warmly but experienced a vision of him as Saraha, surrounded by all the earlier Kagyü gurus.[23] This vision reestablishes a link between the Karmapas and this Indian *mahāsiddha* that Karma Pakshi first established, and it would become a central theme in Rangjung Dorjé's early years at Tsurpu. Another teacher at Tsurpu, Darma Tönpa, who lived in a hermitage behind Tsurpu called Trashi Sarma (New Providence), experienced a similar vision, in which the entire Kagyü lineage, including Tilopa and Nāropā, demonstrated their support for the boy. After this vision, Rangjung Dorjé reported, Darma Tönpa has "an intense admiration" for him.[24]

But while these two teachers welcomed him warmly, other Tsurpu residents were less impressed by his arrival. Rangjung Dorjé's description of this displeasure is both oblique and diplomatic. He merely recalls the need to display a miracle for the edification of the crowd, and says that in response to that need, "Ngak Dakma (Mantra Lady), offered me a cool, pure spring, according to my wishes. And at that time, much foliage (also) sprouted from a dry branch that I planted (next to it)."[25]

Tsuklak Trengwa describes the incident in more detail:

> [After Lama Nyenré's and Darma Tönpa's visions] there were still a few unfortunate, arrogant, faithless beings at Tsurpu. [To dispel their doubts,] Rangjung Dorjé went to a dry rocky place and said, "If I am Karma Pakshi, let a spring arise in this place." As he spoke, a spring appeared. [Then, he held] a half-burned, twisted stick and said, "If I am Karma Pakshi's rebirth, let this too be [reborn]." It happened as he spoke. These two became known as the "*siddha* spring," and the "*siddha* tree."[26]

This story is interesting for several reasons. First, because again it is a local deity [Ngak Dakma, perhaps a consort of the *nāga* king Khanak) who comes to his defense.[27] Second, because in Tsuklak Trengwa's retelling, Rangjung Dorjé causes this miraculous display through the power of his truthful utterances, and, like his evocation of the earth guardians, this story, therefore, resembles the Buddha's call for the earth to be his witness. And third, as it is a display of his power over

nature that catalyzes their change of heart, this story once again evokes the tales of Padmasambhava's and Milarépa's subjugations.

Like the tale of Padmasambhava's Tibetan subjugation, however, Tsuklak Trengwa's retelling is more allegory than actuality. Rangjung Dorjé did not take control of Tsurpu on his arrival nor was he given a position of authority. The monastery remained under the control of Karma Pakshi's family, and a Karmapa would not become its abbot until the fifth Karmapa, Dézhin Shekpa, arrived back from the Ming emperor's court in 1407.[28]

REMODELING TSURPU MONASTERY

After his arrival at Tsurpu, Rangjung Dorjé moved into Khyung Dzong and studied under Lama Nyenré and Darma Tönpa. His autobiographical memories from this time focus not on his isolation but rather on the supportive visions of the monastery's two protectors that he experienced: visions of Black Coat and his consort Remati.[29] In these visions, Black Coat appeared very differently than he had in the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*. At Tsurpu, he was much more wrathful, carrying a white trident in one hand and a skull of blood in the other.[30] Remati too appears in shadowy visions holding a skull full of blood. But despite this wrathful appearance, Rangjung Dorjé still refers to her as "the goddess of the four seasons."[31] Like the visions he had before leaving Bütra, his visions of these two deities are closely linked to his environment. They are described as manifestations of the site's sanctity and they deliver him a blunt message: he is welcome to stay, but this welcome is predicated on his support of uncorrupted Buddhism. If he becomes corrupt, they will chase him out.[32] These visions are symbolic representations of the symbiotic relationship between the Karmapas and Tsurpu. They enforce the Karmapas' connection—rather than Karma Pakshi's family's connection—with the site and integrate the Karmapas' narrative into the longer and more stable institutional narrative of Tsurpu Monastery.

The narrative links between the Karmapas and Tsurpu are, however, said to be quite profound. Unlike the other *ḍākinī*s, spirits, and gods Rangjung Dorjé encounters in his visions, Black Coat and Remati are understood to be "transcendent protectors," emanations of Mahākāla, a wrathful form of Avalokiteśvara. They represent Rangjung Dorjé's highest potential, his buddha nature, which is the ultimate protection from his internal delusions. His visions of them would, therefore, have been taken as signs of his spiritual progress, and this spiritual progress is, in turn, linked to his presence at Tsurpu in a variety of ways.

Both his personal growth and its environmental effects are presented as reasons for Tsurpu's growing sacredness; or, to reflect the liberation stories' description of this process more accurately, the change in people's perception of this always-sacred site is because of the Karmapas' ability to inspire this perception. Its sacredness had first been perceived and described by Düsum Khyenpa when he founded the monastery, and during Karma Pakshi's life, Tsurpu and its surroundings had been inscribed with more and more layers of sanctity. By the time Rangjung Dorjé arrived, it was already being transformed from an ordinary sacred site into a "great sacred site" and presented as a deity's *maṇḍala*. The final form of the Tsurpu *maṇḍala* only appeared centuries after Rangjung Dorjé's death.[33] His contribution to this process was, therefore, significant, but not definitive. Apart from Déchen Teng Hermitage, which he had built later in life in the hills near Tsurpu,[34] he did little to change the region's physical landscape, but his visions of Black Coat and Remati are part of his project to reimagine Tsurpu.

Another way that Rangjung Dorjé's autobiographies and songs reimagine Tsurpu, and promote his relationship with it, is to link unusual natural occurrences to his spiritual development. The first time it does this is in 1294, when a series of earthquakes is said to be a result of ten-year-old Rangjung Dorjé's development

FIGURE 6.1 Tsurpu Monastery (with Khyung Dzong Hermitage in the background). Photograph by Ruth Gamble, 2009.

of "impartial wisdom."[35] Rangjung Dorjé describes this experience as "the conviction that . . . all apparent phenomena are the mind's magic trick."[36] He goes on to describe how this insight led to the unraveling of knots in his channels, which in turn led to intense visions of Black Coat, Remati, and other tantric deities, and the series of earthquakes that lasted for over a year. He describes the earthquakes as the realignment of the external sacred site with his internal subtle-body transformations.[37] Rangjung Dorjé's continued presence, this story suggests, was upgrading Tsurpu's sacredness, and the earthquakes were a sign of this transformation.

Rangjung Dorjé's narrative describes a space being transformed through its residents' insights. This was not an innovation in his cultural setting, but his identity as the third Karmapa changed its context. It linked this transformation to a multi-life narrative and suggested the story of environmental transformation would continue as long as future Karmapas lived at Tsurpu. It was the beginning of the end of family rule at Tsurpu, and this new vision of a sacred site would later spread out across the Plateau.

MEETING SARAHA

After the series of earthquakes and visions had ended, Rangjung Dorjé began composing songs, and he continued to compose them regularly for the rest of his stay at Khyung Dzong. Twenty of the songs he composed during this period have been preserved in his collected songs, but there is a suggestion in his liberation story that he composed more.

The first song in this group is the most well-known. It became well-known because it is a poetic record of an important dream Rangjung Dorjé experienced as a twelve-year-old while visiting Darma at the Trashi Sarma Hermitage. In this visionary dream, he met the legendary *mahāsiddha* Saraha and received "a sign" (*brda'*) from him.[38] The dream further develops the links between Saraha and Rangjung Dorjé that Lama Nyenré's vision of the *mahāsiddha* had started. Orgyenpa had introduced him to Saraha's story and songs when he was a child,[39] but he only began studying his songs at Khyung Dzong with Lama Nyenré.[40] This song and several others that he composed at Khyung Dzong mention Saraha. Rangjung Dorjé was clearly fascinated by his songs and story.

Even more than Padmasambhava and Milarépa—the other two figures that occupy a similarly heroic position in Rangjung Dorjé's writing—the Saraha that Orgyenpa and Lama Nyenré introduced him to was a cultural creation rather than a historic figure. Indeed, the stories and songs about him are so disparate in their

temporal and spatial setting that—like Nāgārjuna—traditional storytellers extend his life to accommodate his accomplishments.[41]

The most common source of these traditional stories, and most probably Rangjung Dorjé's source for them, was the *Histories of the Eighty-Four Siddhas*, which despite its claim to Indian origins was, as Kurtis Schaeffer has suggested, most likely composed in Tibet from Indian oral traditions.[42] Even within this highly esteemed group, Saraha was particularly revered in Tibet, his status achieved at least in part through the attribution to him of several poetry anthologies in all three of the genres associated with the siddhas. The most famous of these collections was the *Song-Treasury of Dohā*, which is also sometimes called the *People's Dohā*.[43] He is also controversially—even within the Tibetan tradition—credited with two other collections of *dohā*: the *Caryāgīti Known as a Song-Treasury of Dohā*, which is also known as the *King's Dohā*; and the *Inexhaustible Treasure of Advice Songs*, or the *Queen's Dohā*.[44] Those songs attributed to him from outside of the *dohā* genre were less influential but have still been preserved. They include several collections of *vajragīti* and four of the songs within the most well-known collection of *caryāgīti,* the *Treasury of Caryāgīti*.[45] Although Rangjung Dorjé most probably had access to all these collections, the influence of the *dohā* is most evident in his writing. He wrote a commentary on the *Song-Treasury of Dohā* and outlines of the other two collections. In his own songs, he uses many of the same metaphors, structures, and irony as Saraha, and his social criticism follows Saraha's lead by focusing on groups, yogis, *tāntrika*s, monks, and patrons.

But the greatest influence Saraha had on Rangjung Dorjé was his presentation of the "view" or ontology. As one of the founders of the *mahāmudrā* tradition, Saraha's presentation of reality influenced all those who subscribed to it, but even within this tradition, Rangjung Dorjé expresses a special affection for and affinity with Saraha's view. It informed not only his personal writing but also many of his philosophical compositions.[46]

Along with the deep respect that Rangjung Dorjé pays to Saraha and particularly to his *Song-Treasury of Dohā*, there are also hints within his personal writing that he identified himself with the *mahāsiddha*. As chapter 2 noted, for instance, in his commentary on Karma Pakshi's liberation story, Rangjung Dorjé suggested that Düsum Khyenpa was Saraha's manifestation.[47] And in one of his songs, Rangjung Dorjé directs his students to imagine him as Saraha.[48] In accordance with his usual self-deprecating style, however, Rangjung Dorjé's respect for the *mahāsiddha* precludes this association from the official list of past lives he gave his followers, in which he instead suggested that he was merely

Saraha's grand-student, Nāgābodhi—the "best student" of Saraha's student Nāgārjuna.[49]

If not direct connections then at least strong links between Saraha and the Karmapas can also be found in the writings of his two predecessors. Karma Pakshi describes experiencing a vision of Saraha surrounded by the rest of the eighty-four *mahāsiddha*s as he traveled to the Mongol court.[50] And Düsum Khyenpa's biographical tradition includes an account of a dream in which he met with Saraha. In this dream, he reports, Saraha emerged from a ball of light and gave him this piece of advice:

> That which is free from four extremes is the view;
> That which is not distracted is cultivation;
> That which neither stops nor sets up is the behavior;
> That which neither abandons nor achieves is the result.[51]

This enumeration of the four elements of *mahāmudrā* practice—the view, cultivation, behavior, and result—is also a repeated theme in Rangjung Dorjé's poetry. But his visionary poetic exchange with Saraha is focused on the first of these four: the view.

His dream song is, furthermore, much more developed than Düsum Khyenpa's single verse. Indeed, from the perspective of its literary format, Rangjung Dorjé's exchange with Saraha is more like the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State* than his other songs. Both texts include a journey to another realm, involve a call and response conversation with a nonhuman, and use environmental settings symbolically. The description of his journey to meet Saraha is as follows:

> One night while I, the yogi Rangjung Dorjé, was staying at Trashi Sarma Hermitage, I dreamt that I traveled with two companions to Śrī Dakṣina Parvata Mountain. We were looking for [Saraha], the guru, the Great Brahman. My two friends went to search on the southern side of the mountain. I stayed alone, in a pleasant, wide, open alpine meadow on the mountain's eastern side. I had just made myself comfortable, sitting alone, when masses of flower-snow began to fall. I responded to this by making cairns out of the fallen flowers and sat in steady contemplation in their midst.[52]

The site of the action, Śrī Dakṣina Parvata, also known as Śrī Sailam, is a site in South India that has traditionally been associated with both Saraha and, more prominently, his student, Nāgārjuna. It is the same site in which Marpa recounted meeting Saraha in a dream.[53] In Rangjung Dorjé's description of the site, however,

the specificity of his South Indian setting is incongruously mixed with Tibetan imagery, with alpine meadows and flower-like snow. His intended audience was clearly not anyone who had traveled to South India.

The exchange began when "a small, sweet voice came down from the sky," whispered to Rangjung Dorjé:

> Child of the lineage, hear this!
> The guru, the Great Brahman [Saraha],
> Is your mind's nature—
> It is a grave mistake to look [for him] elsewhere.
>
> After hearing this, Rangjung Dorjé replied:
>
> *E ma ho!* The guru, the Great Brahman, is
> My mind's nature, and in this
> *Maṇḍala* where variety has one taste,
> There are no seekers and sought;
> My two friends still search,
> While to me, sitting here alone,
> The Great Brahman reveals a sign [*brda'*].
> Ah! How wonderful!

The claim Rangjung Dorjé makes here goes much farther than the vague associations he makes between himself and Saraha in other texts: he claims that the Great Brahman showed him a "sign" (*brda'*).[54] Within the *mahāmudrā* tradition, the showing and comprehension of a sign was and is an advanced form of lineage transmission that is usually performed by a living guru through a practice called "pointing out the nature of mind." This practice had precedents in Saraha's Indian tradition of *mahāmudrā* but became particularly associated in Tibet with Gampopa, whose nontantric introductions created controversy. Rangjung Dorjé's assertion here takes Gampopa's innovation a step further. He not only suggests that he received pointing out instructions and understood them immediately as a twelve-year-old, but that Saraha himself granted him this transmission. In a single dream, he has understood the essence of *mahāmudrā* and become Saraha's lineal heir, at age twelve.

Although he does not say so explicitly, Rangjung Dorjé is relying on his status as a reincarnate when he makes these claims, for it grants him a maturity and capacity for understanding in his narrative that would not necessarily be extended to other twelve-year-old boys. Conversely, this vision could not help but support his claim to be a reincarnate.

The rest of the exchange continues more conventionally, with Saraha's disembodied voice taking Rangjung Dorjé through a presentation of the *mahāmudrā* view. It reads:

> *E ma ho!* This is the guru, the Great Brahman;
> I am your mind's nature, and in this
> *Maṇḍala* where variety has one taste,
> There are no cultivators, nor things to cultivate.
>
> Hey child! This *dohā* is beyond speech,
> Thought, expression, so cultivate its advice!
> Hey child! *Mahāmudrā* is the essence of
> All past, present, future buddhas,
> So stay uncomplicated!
>
> Hey child! In effortless naturalness,
> A state free of extremes,
> Self-aware wisdom is realized;
> Its purpose is [to help] wanderers,
> So don't be distracted, stay balanced!
>
> *E ma ho!* Mind's nature is simplicity,
> It comes from nowhere and has
> Nowhere to go; just like a crazy person.[55]
>
> Hey child! Like a river dissolving into the sea,
> It has no creation and no cessation,
> So stay in *mahāmudrā*!

> This is what he said. And the [flower] cairns I had made, the rocks, the stone mountain all became the Great Brahman. My mindstream was naturalness: no creation, no cessation, no abiding, no edge, and no falling to one side. Ah! So vivid! So relaxed! In this state, there was no distinction between waking and sleeping, and it is this joy that I remember as I sing this song.[56]

As in the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*, this song has Rangjung Dorjé remembering an experience so vividly that he carries it into the present. There it was the darkness of the womb, but here it is a much more vibrant state: "So vivid! So relaxed!" he says, "it is this joy that I remember as I sing this song." This time shift intensifies the description, suggesting that the experience has stayed with him. And, given that this abiding experience was a direct transmission of mind's nature

from Saraha, its occurrence helps strengthen his claim to possess a special kind of lineage. It is this transmission that Rangjung Dorjé reflects on yet again in his *Liberation Story in Verse* when he describes the dream. "Saraha showed me that my own mind was the sacred guru," he says, "and the meaning of his *dohā* came clearly to my mind."[57]

Along with its lineal innovations, this exchange's literary form is also novel. The call and response format enables Rangjung Dorjé—as Saraha—to compose a *dohā*. This is one of only a few instances in which a Tibetan describes his or her own composition with this term. Notably, he has not merely assigned this title to the work, but also paid homage to the Indian genre by adopting specific Indic elements that are not found in his other compositions. His use of the vocative "hey child," for example, reflects the repeated use of this phrase in the *Song Treasury*. [58] Moreover, he also recycles some of the more specific imagery from Saraha's collections. The description of realization as the cessation of "coming and going" is drawn from the *Song Treasury*. The image of a river disappearing into the sea is found in the *Queen's Dohās*, a text that also refers to the mind as "crazy": "like a crazy person," it says, "the mind performs no deeds."

The song is not merely an homage to the Indian tradition, however, for in the last verse, Rangjung Dorjé adds a Tibet-specific frame to this Indic core. It reads:

> *E ma ho!* It is the guru, the Great Brahman.
> It is the mind's nature, uncreated, unceasing.
> It is the one taste of all instructions.
> It is that [of which] all appearances are text, pieces of metaphor.
> [In it] there is no *saṃsāra*, no *nirvāṇa*. *E ma ho!*!

The first three and last lines of this verse repeat ideas that Saraha has already conveyed to him, but in the fourth Rangjung Dorjé adapts Saraha's ideas: "It is that of which all appearances are text, pieces of metaphor."[59] This line requires a dual reading of the Tibetan word for "text," *dpe cha*. The term was most probably constructed because of its phonetic similarity to the Sanskrit word *pustaka*, but coincidentally its first syllable, *dpe*, covers a range of meanings, from "example" or "instance of" to "metaphor," and its second syllable, *cha*, means "piece." The meaning of these individual syllables allows Rangjung Dorjé to suggest a link, which he repeats throughout his songs, between texts and metaphors. Texts, he suggests, even ones that purport to describe the ultimate, are nothing but metaphors for that which they describe, and as any one text only suggests a section of that which they are describing, they are mere "pieces" of this metaphor.

In this verse, he develops this wordplay further by suggesting a link between texts and "appearances." In Rangjung Dorjé's writing and within the *mahāmudrā*

tradition more generally, all that is perceived through the senses are mere appearances. The goal of the *mahāmudrā* practitioner is to realize the emptiness of such appearances. The process that arrives at this understanding begins with the contemplation that these apparently external events cannot be separated from the mind perceiving them, and they must, therefore, be described as fundamentally sensory rather than external phenomena. The senses are then examined as elements of the mind, and this, in turn, leads the yogi to realize that "inside" and "outside" are merely conceptual constructs. Following this, the yogi is encouraged to focus on the mind itself, deconstructing it until he or she discovers its empty nature—the very nature to which Saraha introduces Rangjung Dorjé in this song. The mind's nature is also called buddha nature and a host of other names, including *mahāmudrā* and the ground-of-all. Once yogis have seen it, they continue to cultivate an awareness of it until it becomes their habitual mode of perception. Such cultivation is achieved through a variety of techniques including advanced tantric yogas, in which yogis manipulate the flow of energy within their body to remove subtle physical and mental obstacles to attaining this subtle level of awareness.[60] Later in his songs, Rangjung Dorjé describes this change in perspective like this:

> Outside, a myriad of appearances are
> The mind's projections; it is as if
> They are dreamtime visions, so
> Do not become obsessed [with them]. Rest evenly.
>
> Inside, preconceptions are fleeting,
> [And] in themselves, naturally clear;
> The projections of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* come from this [clarity],
> And are unceasing, self-liberating. Rest evenly.
>
> Knowledge of appearances' duality is unpolluted,
> And in essence, nonconceptual clarity;
> Your mind is Buddha's essence, so
> Realize the nature of this thatness.[61]

Put in this context, Rangjung Dorjé's suggestion that "all appearances are texts, pieces of metaphor" representing mind's nature—which can, therefore, be "read" to develop an understanding of the ultimate—is both a very sophisticated reinterpretation of the *mahāmudrā* tradition and clever wordplay. It supports his general skeptical approach to perceived reality, which is a characteristic of much of his writing, and shows how he has adapted the playfulness with words evident in

Saraha's songs to the Tibetan context. It was these kinds of adaptations that aided his growing reputation.

A STRANGE WORLD

The song just described was also the first in which Rangjung Dorjé focused on the "strangeness" (*mtshar*) of beings' unexamined perceptions.[62] From this point forward, this becomes a strong theme in his songs as he repeatedly points out how bizarre beliefs, behaviors, and even everyday things appear from the perspective of *mahāmudrā*. It is a perspective and technique that he inherited from the greater *mahāmudrā* tradition, but it only appears in his work after he begins to cultivate this view at Khyung Dzong, and again it reflects Saraha's influence on his compositions.

Saraha's influence is apparent, for example, in the objects on which he chose to focus his incongruent gaze. To Saraha, and therefore to Rangjung Dorjé, the most obviously incongruent element of existence was society: the irreconcilable differences between people's social expectations and reality. In criticizing Indian Brahmans, for example, Saraha says:

> They incant, holding earth and water and *kuśa* grass,
> And sit at home making offerings to fire.
> Their oblations are pointless—
> The acrid smoke just stings their eyes.[63]

Rangjung Dorjé offers a similar critique of those he sees following dubious religious paths in his own country, suggesting that

> The world's unseen gods and demons will
> Kill you dead if you depend on them,
> So [don't do it]. Be profound instead.[64]

This criticism is particularly interesting because it was from the world of these "unseen gods and demons" that Rangjung Dorjé derived much of his authority. But here he insists that nontranscendent, nonhumans must also be approached with skepticism, as they are not awakened and cannot, therefore, provide adequate refuge for other beings in *saṃsāra*.

In further instances of Saraha's influence on this first set of songs, Rangjung Dorjé directs his incongruent gaze at those who see themselves as Buddhist

practitioners but are heavily reliant on what both he and Saraha understand to be unreliable words and the conceptual intelligence they create. Saraha expresses this distrust repeatedly in his poetry, but perhaps nowhere more directly than in the following *dohā*:

> The Scholar expounds his treatise in full,
> Not knowing Buddha dwells within his body.
> Coming and going aren't destroyed that way,
> But he says without shame: "I am a scholar."[65]

One of Rangjung Dorjé's early songs expresses a similar view:

> In reality, there is no coming or going, but
> You do not understand that the half-truths
> Presently appearing are untrue, and under
> The influence of fixed ideas and self-fixation
> Fail to realize supreme, perfect meaning.
> The half-truths of cause and effect appear—
> Do you know these are ignorant afflictions?
> [Do you know] these veils cloak wisdom?
>
> Stupid, this is just like you!
>
> This collection of conceptions, veils, and afflictions
> Causes mistaken concepts of right and wrong;
> These are shackling, grand obsessions.
> Deep down, there is no pure "oneness,"
> Final reality is not the domain of thought;
> "Intellect," it is said, "is pretense."
> Fixating on the essence of known things,
> On impossible conceptions of right and wrong,
> Is the distinction of *saṃsāra*'s mind;
> Complete wisdom is uncreated, self-created.
>
> The thick veils that cloak the ground-of-all
> These constant, grand veils,
> Are the ignorant veils of the misinformed,
> Who do not cultivate perfect meaning,
> But possess myriad fixations; [like]
> "Don't you know definitions like this?"
> "Don't you understand logic like this?"[66]

Apparently, this song not only differs in structure from Saraha's short piece but has quite a different tone as well. While Saraha directs his criticism regarding scholarly obsessions outward, here the teenage Rangjung Dorjé blurs the lines between audience and author, intimating that both he and his audience are struggling with the balancing act between learning and skepticism that his tradition requires. His more self-deferential approach displays the influence of both Milarépa and the members of the Kadam tradition, most of whom make a virtue of self-deprecation in their writing. [67]

Rangjung Dorjé's use of this tone does not, however, change its central theme of strangeness, and the central logic that underpins this theme in *mahāmudrā* poetry—namely, that poets, in seeking to express the *mahāmudrā* view, are attempting to describe the indescribable. This tension exists throughout the tradition Rangjung Dorjé inherited and again particularly in Saraha's compositions. This is not an implicit tension; the tradition, including Rangjung Dorjé, revels in it. Right from these early songs, he incorporates the play of contradictions this paradox allows. For example, in one of the earliest of the songs composed at Khyung Dzong, he says:

> Mountain hermits, yogis like me . . .
>
> Cultivate simplicity, and yet
> This does not help anything at all.
> Wander the country with no direction and yet
> This does not help expand our perception.
> Collect felt cases for our texts, and yet
> This does not make our perceptions more comfortable.[68]

Once more including himself with the audience in the opening lines of this verse, he displays a level of self-deprecation that is absent in Saraha's writing. But the main point of this verse is to highlight the existential incongruity or strangeness of *mahāmudrā* poetry.

The verse also uses one of Saraha's and the wider tradition's favorite literary tools to do this: wordplay. In the first couplet, the wordplay revolves around the Tibetan term *gcig kyang med*, which means "nothing at all," but in this case, because it is used as a double negative, it could also mean "anything at all." The first couplet plays on these two meanings, allowing the line to be understood in two ways: directly as an indication that cultivation has not achieved anything; or indirectly such that "nothing at all" means emptiness and as this state is innate, no cultivation will bring about its realization.

In the second couplet, the term that becomes an object of play is *phyogs med*. The most usual meaning of this term in Rangjung Dorjé's writing is "impartiality," which he repeatedly indicates is the best approach toward Buddhist lineages, life's circumstances, and other people. But here he uses the word's individual syllables—the first syllable *phyogs* means "direction" and the second syllable *med* means "none"—to imply that he and other mountain yogis "wander the country with no direction." This wordplay is then combined with a similar image-play that suggests he and other undirected yogis might have wandered around much of the country, but as they have not developed realizations, they have not seen anything more than they would have standing still. The last couplet follows on from this and again, rather than a word play, uses the image of the Tibetans' elaborate text cases. What is the point of these luxurious covers, Rangjung Dorjé asks indirectly, if they do not make the perceptions engendered by their contents "more comfortable"?

Despite their cleverness, particularly considering that a teenager composed them, most of these word and image plays have at least models if not precedents in the *mahāmudrā* tradition of poetry. Another strategy that Rangjung Dorjé adapts from the tradition is to question words themselves. The first time he does this is in the *Collection*'s fifteenth song:

> They are untrue, illusory, uncreated, so
> What use is this collection of words?[69]

Throughout the rest of his song collection, this question becomes something of a stylistic signature. It is an extension of his tendency to cross the fourth wall and talk directly to his audience. But rather than employ more usual expressions of this transition—"Listen up!," "Hear ye, hear ye!"—Rangjung Dorjé adds a meta-narrative to his compositions. This meta-narrative once more undoes the audience's expectations, this time in relation to the conventions of literary composition. It draws readers into the process of composition, thereby encouraging them to approach his compositions as half-truths. They are not to be sanctified for themselves, he suggests, but merely for the insights they create in others' mindstreams.

The structure of Rangjung Dorjé's songs shows that he was a sophisticated teenage thinker and poet, a reputation that can only have enhanced his status as a reincarnate and teacher, but it also shows some of the philosophical underpinnings to his project to reimagine himself and his environment. If all perceptions can be deconstructed, after all, why not deconstruct religious and social identities and structures? But he is careful about the objects he deconstructs. He does not choose to deconstruct his lineage, for example, or the fundamental structures of his society, and his approach to Orgyenpa is positively ornamental rather than deconstructive.

THE LONELY REINCARNATE

In the songs that he composed while he stayed in Khyung Dzong, two things become apparent about Rangjung Dorjé's relationship with Orgyenpa: he was worried about disappointing him, and he missed him. At one point, for example, he gets frustrated at his lack of progress in yoga and reflects that

> Just now, useless visions
> Scattered my thoughts, to the past, to the future.
> I really should cultivate, and not be distracted.
>
> *Mahāmudrā* is the intention of
> Past, present, and future buddhas;
> The final vehicle, the essence of purpose.
> I really should experience it, and not be distracted.[70]

Perhaps the most poignant of his self-doubting songs, however, is the sixth, in which he mixes these doubts with his grief at being separated from Orgyenpa. The song reads in part:

> Father guru, I have not emulated you,
> But I have not given up on great compassion.
> *Mahāmudrā* is the greatest meaning, the essence
> Of all past, present, and future buddhas;
> I am not completely familiar with it,
> But I have not given up on it, the Buddha's intention.
> I have not stayed in isolated sites, mountain retreats,
> I have not experienced austerities like you,
> But I have not forgotten to imagine A HUM.[71]
> I have no expansive understanding
> Of the Tathāgata's discourses,
> But I have not thrown the sacred dharma away.[72]

In the twelfth song from this group, he expresses a similar sentiment:

> Alas! How dark it is for a miscreant
> Mountain hermit like me.
> Father guru, wanderers' hero, compassionate one,
> Inspire this lazy beggar.
> Noble one, from the unseen realm, please inspire me!

It is good for me to stay in this solitude,
This mountain hermitage; [but]
It would also [be good] if I wasn't
Separated from my loving, compassionate guru.
How dark it will remain if you do not realize this![73]

There are many other songs and even ritualized prayers in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition that evoke a longing for the guru as a standard aspect of tantric practice; the collection of Milarépa's songs, for example, contains a famous version of this kind of song.[74] But few of their authors were teenagers, and even fewer had been separated from home by war. These circumstances add poignancy to Rangjung Dorjé's songs that highlight another, often overlooked aspect of the lives of young reincarnates that he was the first to experience: like many other young people chosen for important roles from birth or soon after, they often experience long periods of loneliness and isolation.[75]

OTHER LIVES, OTHER PLACES

The other earnest—as opposed to deconstructive—endeavor in which Rangjung Dorjé engaged while in residence at Khyung Dzong was the remembrance and recording of his past lives. It was at Khyung Dzong that he composed two of the three lists of past lives that were later adopted as standard within the Karmapa tradition:[76] one of these lists is contained within his *Liberation Story of Past Lives* and the other within one of his early songs. While he does not suggest that these two compositions were written to reinforce his status in the light of his continuing exile from Tsurpu's main buildings, it is notable that the monk Darma Tönpa who requested the composition of the *Liberation Story of Past Lives* was one of his main champions at Tsurpu.[77]

It is also notable that in both these compositions, Rangjung Dorjé obfuscates his past life claims. In the *Liberation Story of Past Lives* he does this by doubting his capacity for remembering past lives; his memories of these lives, he suggests, "are cloudy, obscured, gloomy."[78] And throughout his description of the lives, he repeatedly equivocates further by using the expression "it is as if I was" to qualify every memory. By way of example, he describes one of his most well-known past lives by saying: "This is the time of the one known famously as Gyel Chokyang, and it is as if I was him." He then goes on to claim, in direct contrast to the later tradition, that the past lives he is about to discuss had been lived "without control" over how and when they occurred.[79]

In song number 16, however, he takes a more ironic stance toward his previous lives. At the song's beginning, he says: "I have trained for many eons, so I do not need to make an effort now." And at the end:

> Through all these [lives], I have studied,
> Reflected, and cultivated. In life after life,
> I put in a great deal of effort, so
> I do not need to make an effort now . . .
> This may be true, or I may be joking.[80]

This last line places everything he had just said under erasure: the audience would have been left with the memory of his words, but also allowed to disregard them. Not only does this erasure add a level of incongruity or strangeness to his performance, it also facilitates the same equivocation he expressed at the beginning of the *Liberation Story of Past Lives*.

The body of this same song is, by contrast, more self-forward than his other early claims about past-life memories. Rangjung Dorjé even uses these memories to make a take a stand on impartiality by enumerating past lives that align him with various Indian and Tibetan Buddhist lineages. It reads:

> Long ago, in India, I was the master *ācārya* [scholar],
> Ārya Nāgārjuna's best student; Nāgābodhi was my name,
> And I trained in all dharmas.
>
> After this, in India again, I was a *paṇḍita*, and
> My expertise in the three [*sūtra*]
> Baskets and the tantras was unique.
>
> After this, I was Gyel Chokyang, a student of the greatest master,
> The renowned Padmasambhava, and became an expert in Nyingma dharma,
> Particularly the Great Completion, so now I know it without studying it.
>
> After this, I became a *paṇḍita* again,
> And, again, a singular, adroit expert
> In all dharmas, completely qualified.
> After this, I was the one called Potowa, who was connected
>
> To Kharak Gomchung, and an expert in his dharma.
> This person was also a teacher to the great one from Neuzur [Yeshé Bar].
>
> And again, I was the one called
> Śrī Karmapa, who did everything
> He did to help all beings.[81]

The list of six people in this verse is almost the same as the list given in the *Liberation Story of Past Lives* and only slightly different from the list he composed later in life in the *Liberation Story in Verse*.[82] None of the six people this song mentions belong to the same lineage.

Nāgābodhi is known primarily for his relationship with his teacher Nāgārjuna.[83] In Rangjung Dorjé's understanding, Nāgārjuna was an extremely long-lived Indian *siddha* who was not only the founder of the Madhyamaka tradition but also the composer of *In Praise of Dharmadhātu*, which is more aligned to the Yogācāra school, and several works within various tantric lineages.[84] By associating himself with this one person, Rangjung Dorjé would have understood himself to be aligning himself with a variety of Indian philosophical positions and tantric traditions. Moreover, this association also has a specific meaning in the *mahāmudrā* tradition, for within this lineage Nāgārjuna is understood to be Saraha's primary student, which means that through this preincarnation Rangjung Dorjé is also positioning himself as Saraha's grand-student.[85]

The second person listed in the song is unnamed, and the *Liberation Story of Past Lives* lists Gyel Chokyang straight after Nāgābodhi; hence, neither of Rangjung Dorjé's early works elaborates on who this *paṇḍita* might have been. In the later-composed *Liberation Story in Verse*, however, this person is given a name; he is called Kāmadhenu. In the Tibetan tradition, Kāmadhenu is described as the student of Sakarapa, who tradition holds was the first to introduce the *Hevajra Tantra* into the world. This tantra was particularly associated with both the Sakya tradition and a lineage that descends from Marpa's student Ngok Lotsāwa. We have already met Gyel Chokyang (eighth century); he was one of Padmasambhava's closest twenty-five disciples and one of Tibet's first monks. Rangjung Dorjé's association with him solidifies his connection to the Nyingma tradition, the emerging treasure tradition, and the greater, collective Tibetan story.

The *Past Life* and *Verse Liberation Stories* call the next *paṇḍita* in his list Dharmabodhi, a South Indian yogi dedicated to the practice of Avalokiteśvara.[86] This may also refer to the same Dharmabodhi who is described in Milarépa's liberation story as an Indian who eventually visited Tibet and, upon meeting Milarépa, bowed before him.[87]

The fifth and penultimate name on the list is Potowa Rinchen Sel a famous Kadam teacher who was one of Dromtön's three main disciples. Potowa was closely associated with the "Six Basic Texts of Kadam," which include several works with which Rangjung Dorjé expressed a particular affinity, including the *jātaka*.[88] He was an abbot of Radreng Monastery, an institution that Rangjung Dorjé visited several times in his life. He also taught Kharak Gomchung (eleventh and twelfth

centuries) and Neuzur Yeshé Bar (1042–1118), both of whose teachings Rangjung Dorjé admired.[89]

By rounding off this list with "Śri Karmapa," Rangjung Dorjé aligns himself with the Karmapa reincarnation lineage and the Kagyü tradition more generally. The only important lineage from his age with which he does not associate himself is the Sakya, and given the tensions between Kagyü and Sakya at this point, this may have been a pointed omission.

Rangjung Dorjé's inclusion of these various lineages in the Karmapas' backstory unintentionally helped his reincarnation lineage gain acceptance. By including the luminaries of other lineages in his lists, he is asking them to bear witness—like the local, long-lived gods—to his previous lives. Moreover, in claiming to remember his previous lives as members of these lineages, he is claiming the authority of these lineages' forebears in support of the Karmapa reincarnation lineage. The song acts not only as a statement about his ability to remember past lives (and plays with the idea of what this means); it is also an expression of his knowledge of and interest in the greater Tibetan Buddhist world beyond the walls of Khyung Dzong. Shortly after composing this song, he would set off to explore that world.

LEAVING HOME AGAIN

The time Rangjung Dorjé spent at Khyung Dzong was the longest period he lived in any one place in his life: about twelve years. He left Khyung Dzong in stages. The first journeys he took were relatively short but heavily symbolic. The first was to nearby Mount Jomo Gangkar, the home of one of the twelve local goddesses that Padmasambhava had tamed on Pelmo Tang Plain and Rangjung Dorjé had met in the in-between state.[90] Jomo Gangkar was also a site at which the first Karmapa, Düsum Khyenpa, had conducted a lengthy retreat.[91] Rangjung Dorjé's month-long retreat in a cave at Jomo Gangkar's base created a link between him, Padmasambhava, and Düsum Khyenpa. Later in life, he would strengthen this connection by building a statue of Padmasambhava in the same cave.[92]

His second journey was to Gendün Gang Monastery in the Nyé Valley, on the other side of the mountain ridge behind Tsurpu. This monastery had been established by a student of the Kashmiri scholar Paṇchen Śākyaśrībhadra (1127–1225) named Jangchup Pel (thirteenth century), and its residents were, therefore, the holders of Śākyaśrībhadra's revered monastic lineage.[93] Rangjung Dorjé took complete ordination from its abbot, Zhönnu Jangchup (1279–ca. 1358), when he was eighteen years old. After receiving ordination, he stayed on for a few weeks and

studied the texts of monastic discipline, the Vinaya.[94] He was to remain a monk for the rest of his life, and from all accounts including his own he took this obligation seriously, reflecting in some of his poems on his difficulties with celibacy and the yogic practices that he performed to assuage that particular hardship.

The last short trip he took was to the prestigious Sangpu Neutok Monastery, which was renowned as the home of the *pramāṇa*, or logic tradition, in Tibet, and included Düsum Khyenpa among its alumni. While there, Rangjung Dorjé studied with a monk he called "the sacred, spiritual friend Śākya Zhönnu," whom the *Blue Annals* describes as "the abbot of lower Sangpu." The texts he studied included the classics of the *pramāṇa* tradition but also other foundational texts of the Tibetan *sūtra* Mahāyāna tradition.[95]

After making these three journeys, Rangjung Dorjé had established his ability and standing as a yogi, a monk, and a scholar even more firmly. Rather than trying to use these as leverage to gain control of Tsurpu, however, he chose instead to leave it behind, and, following Milarépa's example, went "into the mountains." As the next chapter will describe in more detail, this journey took him first to the two more isolated monasteries associated with the Karmapas in Kham—Karma and Kampo Nénang—where he met with problems similar to those he had encountered at Tsurpu. But following this, he traveled to another mountainous borderland that he would come to consider home, and attempt to return to throughout his life and beyond: the wooded ravines of Kongpo.

NOTES

1. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 9.4–5; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 191.4–5.

2. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 1–29; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 185–208.

3. *Rang byung rdo rje'i dpal chen rnam thar,* 368; *Rang byung rdo rje'i rnam thar tshigs bcad ma*, 381; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 239; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 96; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 38a; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 928; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 360. Both Tshe dbang rgyal and Kun dga' rdo rje suggest that he was given the name Rang byung rdo rje at this ordination ceremony. Gtsug lag phreng ba and Si tu Paṇ chen say that he was given the name Rang byung rdo rje name by O rgyan pa.

4. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 381.

5. Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 35.

6. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 129.4–5; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 292.5–6.

7. Bsod nams 'od zer, *O rgyan pa'i rnam thar*, 185; and Roberto Vitali, "Grub chen U rgyan pa and the Mongols of China," in *Studies on the History and Literature of Tibet and the Himalayas*, ed. Roberto Vitali (Kathmandu: Vajra, 2012), 45.

8. Bsod nams 'od zer, *O rgyan pa'i rnam thar*, 225; and Vitali, "U rgyan pa and the Mongols," 46n47.

9. Li, "U rgyan pa's Biographies," 95–96.

10. 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. *ca*, 27b; Petech, "Yuan-Sa-skya Partnership," 350; and Li, "U rgyan pa Biographies," 96. For more information on Du'a, see Reuven Amitai and David Orrin Morgan, *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

11. Li, "U rgyan pa's Biographies," 86.

12. Li, "U rgyan pa's Biographies," 96. The story comes from one of the liberation stories of O rgyan pa that she analyzed for her PhD dissertation. As Li describes it, this liberation story was written by Chu mig pa rin rgyal and "consists of several key episodes about U rgyan pa's visit to Yar klungs, his tactics in dealing with the Stod Hor and (Smad) Hor, his grudges with the Tsha mda' clan and his niece (or grand-niece?) (*dbon mo*), interpolated by some minor scenes mostly not found in other biographies." She acquired this text, which is called *Gsung sgros rnam thar chung ba bzhugs*, from the Paltseg Institute: "U rgyan pa's Biographies," 57.

13. Li, "U rgyan pa's Biographies," 96.

14. These were the twenty-one shield bearers that had been in Rang byung rdo rje's vision.

15. Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 360–261.

16. Li, "U rgyan pa's Biographies," 96.

17. Vitali, "U rgyan pa and the Mongols," 48–49.

18. Vitali, "U rgyan pa and the Mongols," 48–50.

19. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 381–382; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 98; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 928; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 360. Gnyan ras was a student of Par phu ba blo gros seng ge (twelfth century). Gnyan was also Ras chung pa'is family name: Roberts, *The Biographies of Rechungpa*, 85.

20. Mkha' nag is the seventh of eight *nāga* kings often seated around Vajrapāṇi.

21. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 382.

22. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 98; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 928; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 361.

23. *Rang byung rdo rje'i dpal chen rnam thar,* 362; *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 382; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 96; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 38a; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 928; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 361.

24. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 382.

25. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma* 382.

26. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 928.

27. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 382. Alternately, this name may also suggest that this deity is an emanation of Tārā named Ekajaṭī (or Ekajaṭā). This is Roerich's reading in the *Blue Annals*, 489.

28. The list of Mtshur phu's abbots is in 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 51b. Kun dga' rdo rje also describes their influence, in *Deb ther dmar po*, 107: "When the dharma noble stayed at Mtshur phu, the [familial] lineage of Karma Pak shi still acted as its abbots."

29. This deity is also known as Dpal ldan lha mo (Glorious Goddess). The only other protector to make an appearance in his visions during this time is Vaiśravaṇa (Rnam thos sras), and this is only after Rang byung rdo rje evokes his pure land during a ceremony: *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 383.

30. *Rang byung rdo rje'i dpal chen rnam thar,* 370.

31. Tib. *dus bzhi lha mo. Rang byung rdo rje'i dpal chen rnam thar,* 371.

32. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 383.

33. Eventually, Mtshur phu was presented in a schema that aligned the three major Karma bka' brgyud monasteries of Mtshur phu, Karma, and Kam po gnas nang respectively with the mind, speech, and body *maṇḍala*s of the Karmapas: Rin chen dpal bzang, *Mtshur phu dgon gyi*

dkar chag kun gsal me long (Pe cin [Beijing], China:: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1995), 15. This transformation depended upon closer alignment between the Karmapas and Avalokiteśvara.

34. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 403; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 100; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 39a; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 932; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 374.

35. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 98; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 929; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 362.

36. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 383.

37. *Rang byung rdo rje'i dpal chen rnam thar,* 369; *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma,* 383; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 97; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 929; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 362. Also, *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 2–29; and *Gsung mgur phyogs sdebs,* 186–208. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 383, includes his description of another vision in which he exchanged verses with Re ma ti.

38. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 3.3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 186.1. This song's dream performance is mentioned at the end of the survey of visions that follows the *Bar de'i rnam thar,* 372–373, and in *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma,* 383.6. It is also mentioned in Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 929; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 362. It has been translated and analyzed in Kurtis Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin: Creative Traditions of the Buddhist Poet-Saint Saraha* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 41–42.

39. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 382; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 37a; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 358.

40. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 387; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 239; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po,* 38a; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 929; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 362.

41. Despite the many works attributed to him, Saraha has proved an especially elusive figure. Schaeffer, who wrote a book on his legend, notes that his personal details were obscured by the "creativity that his image inspired in a number of religious and cultural arenas," *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 5.

42. Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 13–15. The Tibetan text can be found in the multilingual (Tibetan, Hindi, Apabhraṃśa) work by Abhayadatta, *Caturaśītisiddhapravrtti* (Sarnath: Kendriya Ucca Tibbati-Siksa Samsthana, 1979).

43. The composition of this text and its transmission to Tibet have also been analyzed in Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 59–70.

44. The controversy surrounding them has been explained in Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 71–78. Traditional scholars who advocate for these two works' attribution to Saraha often cite Rang byung rdo rje's composition of commentaries on them as proof of their validity, arguing that Rang byung rdo rje's composition of commentaries about them legitimize them: Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 75. It is not clear, however, whether these commentaries to which they refer are the short outlines of the two texts included within his *Gsung 'bum* (vol. *a*, 177–180, 180–185), collated in 2006, or whether there were other nonextant but longer commentaries composed by him. In any case, these outlines stand in stark contrast to the two more lengthy commentaries he composed on the *Song-Treasury of Dohā: Do ha mdzod kyi bsdud don bcad*, vol. *a*, 185–191; and *Dri ma med pa'i sgron me*, vol. *a*, 193–264.

45. Braitstein, "Saraha's Adamantine Songs"; Lara E. Braitstein, "The Extraordinary Path: Saraha's Adamantine Songs and the Bka' brgyud Great Seal," in Roger R. Jackson, and Matthew T. Kapstein, eds., *Mahāmudrā and the Bka' brgyud Tradition* (Andiast, Switzerland: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2011); and Lara E.

Braitstein, *The Adamantine Songs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015) are all studies of Saraha's *vajragīti*. The songs attributed to Saraha in the *Caryagītikośa* are the twenty-second, thirty-second, thirty-eighth, and thirty-ninth. As Per Kværne has noted, the collection was probably compiled by one Munidatta in the process of writing a commentary on them, in Sanskrit: Kværne, *Anthology of Buddhist Tantric Songs*, 3.

46. A few details in Rang byung rdo rje's stories and songs are worth noting in this regard. The first is that he composed his commentary on Saraha's *Song-Treasury of Dohā* during the same stay at Karma in 1327 during which he composed his commentary on Nāgārjuna's *In Praise of Dharmadhātu*, both of which were influential on his presentation of the view. The second is that, as will be discussed shortly, he understood himself to have been Nāgārjuna's student and Saraha's grand-student in his previous life as Nāgābodhi.

47. He does this in the commentary he embeds in the retelling of Karma Pakshi's liberation story in vol. *nga* of *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum: Bla ma rin po che'i rnam par thar pa'o,* 276–277.

48. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 179–181; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 396–397.

49. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 23–24; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 203–204.

50. Schaeffer describes the dream Karma Pakshi has of Saraha and the other eighty-four *mahāsiddhas: Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 41. As Schaeffer points out, this is one of the earliest mentions of the group of *siddhas* in Tibetan literature. This suggests that their stories had currency before Rang byung rdo rje's time in his tradition. Karma Pakshi's own recounting of this dream can be found in Karma pak shi, *Bka' 'bum*, 102.

51. Rgwa Lo tsā ba, *Ser gling*, 55; Gzhon nu byang chub, "Re'u mig brga rtsa brgyad," 104.

52. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 2.1–5; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 185.3–6. A translation of the song by Schaeffer appears in *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 41–42.

53. Richard Shaw, "Srisailam: Centre of the Siddhas," *South Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (1997), 161–178.

54. All three Tibetans from the Bka' brgyud tradition with whom I read this verse impressed on me the significance of Saraha's granting a sign to Rang byung rdo rje.

55. The *Mgur rnam* says *bsnyon pa*, which means "the denier." This is probably a misspelling of the homonym *smyon pa*, which is the *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*'s spelling. This means "crazy" and is a metaphor that Saraha uses elsewhere.

56. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 3.1–7.2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 185.6–188.4. The Tibetan expression *nyams su lang* is usually translated as "practice." But as it means "take the experience," and Rang byung rdo rje often uses it in the imperative, I have translated it as "experience" or "arouse this experience."

57. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 383.

58. In Apabraṃśa, this is *are putto*; Tib. *bu*.

59. Tib. *Snang ba thams cad dpe cha yin*.

60. These are described in Dwag po bkra bshis rnam rgyal, *Zla ba'i 'od gsal,* 133–518.

61. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 101.5–102.1; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 265.3–7. It is called *The Song That Settles Subjects and Objects*.

62. This word *mtshar* also means "wonderment" and "amazement," which are the terms that are usually used to translate it. Rang byung rdo rje's usage of this word, however, is much more closely aligned with the English words *strange* and *strangeness*. Within Rang byung rdo rje's personal writing, references to this "strangeness" can be found in *Mgur rnam*, 27–28, 112–114, 116–117, and 153–157; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 206–207, 273–276, 278–279, and 375–378.

63. This translation of the *Song-Treasury of Dohā* is from Roger Jackson, *Tantric Treasures: Three Collections of Mystical Verse from Buddhist India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 53. There are many other examples of social criticism within the *Song Treasury of Dohā*.

64. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 12.3–4; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 194.1.

65. Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 92.

66. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 19.4–20.3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 200.2–201.2.

67. I have discussed Mi la ras pa's self-deprecating tone elsewhere in respect to his humor: Gamble, "Laughing Vajra," 146–147. Amy Miller speaks tangentially about the importance that the Bka' gdams tradition places on humility in "Jeweled Dialogues," 42–45.

68. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 7.7–8.3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 189.6–190.3.

69. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 22.5; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 202.1–2.

70. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 16.5–17.6; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 198.2–6.

71. These syllables are used in inner heat yoga practice, one of the six dharmas of Nāropā.

72. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 7.4–8.3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 189.5–190.3.

73. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 17.7–18.1; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 198.6–199.2.

74. Mi la ras pa's *Life and Songs* contain an episode in which he sings a song about missing Mar pa. This song does not appear in earlier versions of his liberation story, but it is found within Mkha' spyod dbang po's retelling of the tale, *Gsung 'bum*, 2.219. It is set on "Red Rock Protruding Summit" (Brag dmar spo mthon). It is also in Gtsang smyon Heruka's version, in which he calls the same place "Red Rock Jewel Valley" (Brag dmar mchong lung): *Mi la ras pa'i rnam mgur*, 196.

75. Many reincarnates have since reflected on this, including the present Dalai Lama, in *Freedom in Exile: Autobiography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet* (New York: HarperOne, 1991); and Chögyam Trungpa, who called a chapter in his biography "Lonely Vocation": *Born in Tibet* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2010), 123–143.

76. This is the list that is given, for example, at the start of Dus gsum mkhyen pa's life story in 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po,* 31a–31b. Dus gsum mkhyen pa's biography contains his remembrances of an entirely different set of lives.

77. *Rang byung rdo rje'i dpal chen rnam thar,* 373.

78. *Rang byung rdo rje'i dpal chen rnam thar,* 355.

79. *Rang byung rdo rje'i sngar skye rnam tha,* 356. Tib. *rgyal ba mchog dbyangs zhes grags pa de dang dus mtshungs pa yin pa 'dra.*

80. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 24.2–3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 204.3. In Tibetan, the last line reads *mad kyang ku re byis pa lags*. This suggests two readings that pivot on a play between two words: *mad* (*pa*), which means "truth," and *med*, which is an existential negating particle and, therefore, means "there is not." Both of these syllables are pronounced exactly the same: "mé." This means that although the scribes of this performance wrote the word down as *mad*, and therefore delivered the meaning "(All) this may be the truth, or I may be joking," when he delivered this line, it could also have meant "These didn't happen, I am just joking."

81. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 23.1–24.4; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* 203.3–204.3.

82. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 376–378.

83. Although all three sources list the first person on the list, they describe them differently. This verse calls him Nāgābodhi (Klu'i byang chub), the *Sngar skye rnam thar* gives him no name, and the *Tshigs bcad ma* calls him Prajñālamkāra (Shes rab rgyan)—the latter is, coincidently, similar to a name that Karma Pakshi gives one of his previous incarnations, Shes rab rgyal ba. The details of the life both Karmapas describe are the same. For more details on the

differences between the early Karmapas variant past-life claims, see Manson, "Elastic Time, Magical Memories."

84. Modern scholars dispute the idea that it was the same Nāgārjuna who composed works in accordance with these three schools. They attribute the works of "Nāgārjuna" to at least two and sometimes three different people. See Christian Lindtner, *Nāgārjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna* (Copenhagen: Akademisk, 1982).

85. Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 26–27.

86. *Rang byung rdo rje'i dpal chen rnam thar,* 356; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 376–377.

87. Although there is no mention of this meeting in the extant texts of the Mi la ras pa tradition dated to Rang byung rdo rje's lifetime, the story did make its way into Mkha' spyod dbang po's version of Mi la ras pa's liberation story, which was composed shortly after Rang byung rdo rje's death: *Mkha' spyod dbang po'i gsung 'bum*, 2.294. The *Skye rnam thar* also mentions another life between these two in which he was a student of "the noble Kamalaśīla: 356–357. *Tshigs bcad ma* does not include this life. It says he "performed deeds in an eastern city," which suggests an intermediary life in China: 378.

88. See chapter 1, note 57.

89. 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. *ca* 13a. Sne'u zur is one of Pu to ba's disciples.

90. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 387; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 929; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 365.

91. Gzhon nu byang chub, "Re'u mig brga rtsa brgyad," 88; Rgwa Lo tsā ba, *Ser gling*, 41.

92. *Rang byung rdo rje'i bar de'i rnam thar,* 368; *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 381; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 238; 239; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 96; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 928; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 360.

93. David Jackson, *Two Biographies of Śākyaśrībhadra: The Eulogy by Khro phu Lo tsā ba and Its "Commentary" by Bsod nams dpal bzang po* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1990). Van der Kuijp includes a short discussion of Dge 'dun sgang Monastery's ordination lineage in "On the *Lives* of Sakyasribhadra," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114, no. 4 (1995): 604n19.

94. Rang byung rdo rje was ordained by the abbot of Dge 'dun sgang, Gzhon nu byang chub. Gzhon nu byung chub is named as the third in list of Dge 'dun sgang's abbots: 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. *pha*, 5b; *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 387; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 239; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 96; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 38a; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 928; Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 360. Elena Pakhoutova describes a *thang kha* that records this ordination, "A Wondrous Great Accomplishment: A Painting of an Event," in *The Arts of Tibetan Painting. PIATS 2010: Proceedings of the Twelfth Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Vancouver*, 2010 (http://www.asianart.com/articles/pakhoutova/index.html).

95. Leonard van der Kuijp has written a survey of this monastery and its succession: "The Monastery of Gsang-phu Ne'u-thog and Its Abbatial Succession from ca. 1073 to 1250," *Berliner Indologische Studien* 3 (1987), 103–127. Dus gsum mkhyen pa's stay there is noted in Rgwa Lo tsā ba, *Ser gling*, 38; *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 387; and 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 38b. The texts Rang byung rdo studied their included *Maitreya's Five Texts* (*Byams chos sde lnga*), Nāgārjuna's *Roots of Mādhyamaka* (Skt. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*; Tib. *Dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab*); Vasabandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma* (Skt. *Abhidharmakoṣa*; Tib. *Chos mngon pa'i mdzod*), which is associated with the Hīnayāna in the Tibetan tradition; and his brother Asaṅga's *Compendium of Abhidharma* (Skt. *Abhidarmasamuccaya*; Tib. *Chos mngon pa'i kun btus*), which is associated with the *sūtra* Mahāyāna tradition.

7

Into the Mountains

If you don't know your body's solitude,
Escaping to the wilderness is useless.
If you don't isolate preconceptions,
Relying on isolated places is useless.

Rangjung Dorjé, 1312, aged twenty-nine,Trashi Jong, Tsari[1]

In 1302, at the age of nineteen, Rangjung Dorjé left Tsurpu monastery to live in the mountains. During the next twelve years, he spent less than eighteen months in central Tibet and even less time at Tsurpu.

His first journey took him to Kham, the birthplace of the first and second Karmapas and the site of the two monasteries they had built and repaired: Karma in the north and Kampo Nénang in the south. To perform his role as the Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé had to make some connection with these monasteries. At Karma, he did almost the same things he had done at Tsurpu. In deference to Karma Pakshi's family, he moved into a nearby hermitage, where he lived for five years, continued his retreats, and composed another set of retreat-inspired songs. But unlike his time at Tsurpu, where powerful mentors protected him, at Karma he was on his own. This isolation led to physical deprivations and other threats to his life, including at least one assassination attempt.

At Kampo Nénang, the welcome from the local humans was even less cordial, and for unexplained reasons, he did not enter the monastery's grounds. He did, however, have much to do in Kampo Nénang's neighborhood. First, he helped stop the fighting that had been raging nearby, and shortly after that, he was invited farther south to visit the magnificent Mount Khawa Karpo. While at Khawa Karpo,

he became involved with its maṇḍalization, writing a praise to it and describing its special role in his autobiography.

His writing about Khawa Karpo suggests that he intended to stay there for at least a few years, but in the summer of 1309, he experienced an intense vision of Orgyenpa, which was followed by news of his death. Rangjung Dorjé returned immediately to central Tibet, where he stayed for just under a year. During this stay he visited Tsurpu but based himself nearby at Nyédo Monastery in the Nyé Valley; this was the home of Orgyenpa's student, and Götsangpa's reincarnation, Künga Özer. Following a short side trip to Tsel induced by the death of its myriarch, he went into retreat farther up the Nyé Valley at the base of Mount Jomo Gangkar. Here he experienced a vision that would have a profound impact on the rest of his life. In the vision, the local deities of Kongpo in southern Tibet invited him to set up a hermitage at their most sacred site: Tsari. The people of Kongpo were to become the Karmapas' primary champions for generations; both he and the next two Karmapas relied on their support. It is hard to see how their lineage would have survived without the support they received from there.

Once again, though, his stay in the borderlands was interrupted—this time by ill health. During this episode of sickness, he made a vow, in the presence of Mount Yarlha Shampo, to "better dedicate himself to the welfare of others." As a result of this commitment, he determined to return central Tibet, where he spent most of the next ten years relatively stationary, teaching a growing number of students and composing many of the texts that systemized and consolidated the Karma Kagyü tradition, and helped make his name. He performed much of this work while staying at a new hermitage he founded near Tsurpu, a place he called Déchen Teng Hermitage. It was there, at the age of forty-one, he composed his *Liberation Story in Verse*, in which he is still contemplating what it means to be a Karmapa.

TO KARMA MONASTERY

When Rangjung Dorjé decided to leave Tsurpu in 1302, the nineteen-year-old had only just returned from a period of intensive study at Sangpu Neuthok Monastery. He composed a song at the beginning of his journey that reflected on his decision, describing both the lure of isolated hermitages and his concerns about living in central Tibet. It reads in part:

> None of the worldly visions of this life
> Are true, so if you want to attain
> Unending, great bliss, always

Volunteer for dharma's suffering.
There is no end to today's work so
Stay for a long time in mountain retreats.[2]

Around this time, he had also been granted an audience by Jamyang Rinchen Gyeltsen (d. 1305), who had been the abbot of Sakya and was on his way to take up the post of imperial preceptor in Dadu.[3] In an unusual show of respect toward a member of the Sakya lineage, Rangjung Dorjé describes the elderly monk with affection and reports that he inspired a "pure vision" in which Rangjung Dorjé saw "many bodhisattvas" and took this as a sign that his future activities would be successful.[4]

Following this meeting, there is a distinct shift in emphasis in his stories and songs; they are now focused on travel. It was a thirteen-hundred-kilometer journey from Tsurpu to Karma, so he had plenty of time to contemplate that road, and this is reflected in several of the songs he composed during this period, two of which have travel as a central theme.

The first of these aligns mental afflictions with environmental imagery. Most of its metaphors are common in the Buddhist literary tradition. Rangjung Dorjé's innovation is to list the images one after another, giving the sense that the afflictions and the external environment are ambushing the reader. It reads in part:

Saṃsāra is a fierce, scalding fire pit.
Ignorance is cloaking, deep, murky darkness.
Birth, aging, sickness, and death are a great river.
Arrogance is a steep, rocky mountain.
Jealousy is a great, raging storm.
Wicked words pierce like thorns.[5]

After finishing his journey, he reflected on what the long journey had entailed in another song. Unlike the song he composed on the road, this song is long and complex, combining *kāvya* synonyms with tantric imagery in a process of circular reflection that begins with the mind, and then moves out to the body, and finally the environment, before dissolving all these images back into nondual wisdom. It begins by aligning awakened awareness with the light of the sun and moon.

Wherever they are, [the sun], the king of seven horses
And the [moon], the rabbit holder, naturally
Radiate hot sunbeams and cool moonlight
That travel beyond abilities and suffering.[6]

Evoking a traditional *kāvya* image, he describes the sun here as "the king of seven horses," an allusion to the Indian sun-god Sūrya, who is said to travel across the sky in a seven-horse carriage. The reference to the moon as "the rabbit holder" refers to shadows on the lunar surface that resemble a rabbit. It is such a common synonym for the moon that it is often used without explanation. The last image of the verse aligns the light from these two heavenly bodies with wisdom, in that—like sun and moonlight—wisdom is spread impartially beyond limited constructions of "abilities and suffering." This pairing of "abilities and suffering" is unusual in Buddhist literature. "Suffering" is often paired with its opposite "happiness" or "bliss." The term "abilities" is usually used to describe the positive attributes of a realized being or a buddha and not as part of an experiential dyad. By combining these two, Rangjung Dorjé suggests that this wisdom passes beyond both the experiential dyad of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* and the conceptual dyad of awakened and nonawakened.

The next section of the poem moves its focus from the mind itself to its relationship with the physical world. It reads:

> Here in upper [but] unrealized realms,
> We enter sensual paths; [on these paths]
> Our mind runs to [various] places,
> But ends up in Rāhu's mouth. [7]

Here Rangjung Dorjé likens the process by which the mind engages objects through the senses to the experience of running down a path. He then links this analogy with the earlier connection between light and wisdom, by suggesting that the destination of all this running is darkness; the mouth of Rāhu, an *asura*, a demigod that eats the sun god, causing eclipses.

In the next verse, he turns the focus inward, mapping all these celestial bodies onto the human body. He does this by first evoking the traditional Indian and Tibetan tripartite cosmological division of sky, earth, and subterranean worlds, and then situating them within the body: the abode of Brahmā, the highest point of *saṃsāra*, is placed at the top of the head; the sun, moon, and stars are situated in the middle, and the netherworld of the *nāga*s is aligned with his and his audience's nether regions. The verse reads:

> From the abode of Brahmā to down
> Below, where the Lord of the Nāgas is coiled,
> That which is by nature the sun, moon, and stars,
> Should all be subdued . . . [8]

Once he and his audience can subdue their bodies, he suggests, they will be able to subdue the universe, as it is merely a construction of body-based, sensuous experiences. The song then goes on to explain how to do this in great technical detail, describing meditations that move the subtle energies into the central channel. The song's last two verses describe the resultant change in the yogi's view, and the arising of wisdom:

> It is the final freedom in the deepest ocean,
> The illumination of mountain peaks,
> Clear as the glow of jasmine and lightning—
> Attain this precious treasure!
>
> This will mean travel beyond, to wisdom,
> In which there is natural movement and stillness.
> The great, the ordinary, and the rest,
> All come from there; there is nothing else.[9]

This conclusion begins by reevoking the song's initial image of wisdom as the light of the sun and moon, which permeates all. But it develops this, reflecting on how far both light and wisdom travel—so far that eventually they transcend stillness and movement. The song has expanded out from the body into space and speaks of transcending space too.

The other song of Rangjung Dorjé's from this period that evokes travel is, by contrast, much more straightforward in both imagery and subject matter. It uses a travel image that makes its debut in this song but is employed repeatedly after this: horses. The song begins by describing another catalyst for his leaving central Tibet; that region is, in his estimation, a place where intellectualizing is privileged over insight. He then aligns his horseback journey to Kham with a yogic journey beyond conception. It reads in part:

> The view of great wisdom
> Is an intellectual, analytical barrier.
> The practice lineage's teachings have a banner,
> And it brushes[10] away jealous frosts.
> Lucky ones, sitting here,
> If you want to attain awakening quickly,
> Place the bright saddle of clear bodhicitta
> On the faithful stallion of wisdom,
> Use the quick whip of diligence,
> Follow the guru who knows liberation's path,
> And gallop as far as you can. Now is the time.[11]

This movement away from both society and intellectualization into the wilderness was a major theme of Rangjung Dorjé's writing during this period. He presented Kham as a borderland, like the borderlands Milarépa acclaimed, and wrote that his time here would make him a real yogi. In his descriptions of eastern Tibet, he makes no mention of the Mongols or their Sakya regents. Instead, he describes various local rulers, some good and some bad, living much more roughly than their counterparts in central Tibet.

His first stop was Karma Monastery, the site that gave the Karmapa body rosary its name. As he explains in both his stories and songs, he spent five years in or near this monastery engaged in retreats focused on the Great Completion, which he worked to incorporate with the *mahāmudrā* yogas he had practiced at Tsurpu.

Despite later commentaries to the contrary,[12] there is no suggestion in Rangjung Dorjé's writing that he took control of Karma Monastery. Following the pattern he had established at Tsurpu, he lived nearby. This time, however, he built his own hut, at Lha Teng (Divine Heights), in a forest adjacent to the monastery.[13] In this hut, he practiced yogas associated with the *Ḍākinīs' Heart-Essence* cycle of treasure texts. According to his autobiography, he had tried to practice these yogas at Tsurpu but had little success. At Lha Teng, however, he reported a series of breakthroughs. The first of these was a vision of Vimalamitra (ca. eighth century), who appeared before him in "the bright light that arises as dawn ends," and then "dissolved into the middle of [his] forehead." This vision led, he goes on to say, "to an extremely clear understanding of the Great Completion."[14]

While his autobiographical reflections focused on his achievements at Lha Teng, the songs he wrote while he was there concentrated on personal difficulties and local tensions. The songs paint a portrait of him and his friends as a small group of forest-dwelling yogis with limited food and few local friends. The following verse was supposed to encourage them:

> To train in this way [you will need]
> To make a home in an isolated solitude,
> To depend on forests and trees,
> To [wear] clothes of discarded rags,
> To act like your breath has left you,
> To eat food as various as birds, and
> To be attached to nothing.[15]

Several years after Rangjung Dorjé wrote these lines, a forest fire broke out at Lha Teng, which threatened the lives of all its hermits. While this event had all

the indicators of a tragedy, it became a moment of triumph for the young monk. Characteristically, Tsuglag Trengwa provides the most detailed account of the event, reporting that

> [when he was staying] at Lha Teng, a great fire began to burn adventitiously. Nobody knew what to do and fled. Fearing for his life the scholar monk Zhönnu Bum sought refuge with Rangjung Dorjé, and [therefore watched as] Rangjung Dorjé spoke [directly to the flames] saying:
>
> If I possess altruism as pure as those of old,
> If I have accrued the [qualities] of a buddha,
> If I am now a lord of the tenth ground,
> Then by the power of the truth of my words
> May this great conflagration be pacified.
>
> He then snapped his fingers, and immediately rain began to fall among licking flames that pervaded the sky, causing a mix of dark brown smoke and clouds before the fire went out.[16]

In this description, Tsuglag Trengwa repeats the narrative device he used when Rangjung Dorjé arrived at Tsurpu: he has him use "words of truth" (*tshigs bden*) to subdue and transform the elements. Rangjung Dorjé's own description of events does not include either this rhetorical device or the attendant claims to Buddhahood, but like his description of his arrival at Tsurpu, it does suggest he did something:

> [While I was staying] in the forest of Lha Teng, a great fire arose. Then out of the smoke came thunder and rain, which instantly pacified the fire. It kept raining, and water flowed everywhere. This pacified not only [the fire] but the people [of the forest], who were terrified. They praised me for what I had done.[17]

Following this event, the colophons of Rangjung Dorjé's songs suggest that he was invited to an increasing number of *gaṇacakra,* or tantric feasts on auspicious days: (1) the eighth of each month, which was a Medicine Buddha day; (2) the tenth of each month, the Padmasambhava day; and (3) the twenty-fifth, which was a day dedicated to Cakrasamvara and Vajrayoginī. Both the songs and the liberation stories also suggest that as his reputation grew, the attendance at this feast grew, until he was performing his songs for "large crowds."

The reaction from the local power brokers to his increasing popularity was not, however, positive. The threats to his life became more direct than they had been before, and in one of his songs from this time, he refers to himself as "this monk, this young boy, this corpse."[18] The tense situation reached a climax one night in 1306. While the then-twenty-three-year-old slept, he dreamt that Mañjuśrī manifested before him as Yamāntaka, with three faces, six hands, a garland of fire, an expression like a dark cloud, and a voice like thunder. From this, he says obscurely that, he "understood that the obstacles created by the casting of evil spells were being reversed."[19] Situ Paṇchen's version of the story provides more detail.

> At that time, several jealous locals could no longer stand his fame and large following. One of them was quite wealthy and used this wealth to accrue dark power. Eventually, he persuaded eight people to begin performing the very wrathful Yama [Lord of Death] practice [against Rangjung Dorjé]. But while they recited it, the sworn enemy of Yama, Mañjuśrī [as Yamāntaka] appeared in their fire with three faces and six arms, and began reciting mantras. This stopped their recitations. It also caused the cave they were in to collapse, and they all traveled to the other side [i.e., died]. Many people had a vision of this, and [instead of ending his life and influence], it led to his receiving an increasing number of offerings.[20]

This story is noteworthy not only because it describes how locals view him as a threat but also because it is yet another example in his story of his deriving authority from nonhumans.

TROUBLE AT KAMPO NÉNANG MONASTERY

Despite or perhaps because of his success at Karma, Rangjung Dorjé left his retreat at Lha Teng the year after the cave incident. Following his departure, he traveled for over a year, down through the high ridges and deep river gorges of southeastern Tibet.

His destination was the last of the three monasteries the first Karmapa had founded and the second Karmapa had repaired: Kampo Nénang, which still stands today about eighty kilometers north of Litang in Sichuan.[21] Following a familiar pattern, he traveled to the monastery at the behest of the region's nonhuman inhabitants—in this case, the deity called Dorjé Peltsek (Vajra Glory Mound). The first two Karmapas' biographies describe their own meetings with and conversion of Dorjé Peltsek. Rangjung Dorjé acknowledges this precedent by calling him a

"lay Buddhist," which is to say one who is bound by the five most fundamental Buddhist vows.[22] Like many other local gods, Dorjé Peltsek is described as a white man on a white horse, and as Rangjung Dorjé explains events, the god not only invited him to the area but also came to welcome him. "When I was traveling to Kampo Nénang," he says, "I saw the great lay Buddhist Dorjé Peltsek riding a white horse with a red mane. He gestured to indicate that he was happy to see me and had come to welcome me."[23]

Despite this celestial welcome, the humans at Kampo Nénang were decidedly less cordial. Rangjung Dorjé does not provide details about what occurred as he approached this monastery, and neither do later redactors. All they acknowledge is that he traveled into the area, was greeted by Dorjé Peltsek, and then left without staying at one of his lineage's most important monasteries. He never returned to Kampo Nénang.

Instead, he explains in the *Liberation Story in Verse*, he traveled farther south "subduing the enemies of the lay Buddhist Rongtsen Khawa Karpo (Spirit of the Ravine, Snow White)," the god who resided on Mount Khawa Karpo. Eventually, Rangjung Dorjé says he was granted a vision of the local god, who appeared to him "a man on a white horse [wearing] a white, silken coat . . . [next to] a divine mansion."[24] This god, he continues, led him to a village called Kolti, where he came to understand that the "great fight" that had beset its inhabitants for generations "was caused by nonhumans." So, he used his "*samādhi* to calm them down," until "they did as I said, and I heard them speaking kind words to each other."[25]

His songs from the same period, by contrast, do not mention Kampo Nénang, Rongtsen Khawa Karpo, or the celestial war. But one of them does focus on the human agent's in Kolti's "civil strife."[26] Evoking the vast physical geography of the region, the song begins by situating Kolti: "on a small ridge that arose when the earth boiled."[27] It then goes on to describe the corruption and hypocrisy of Kolti's inhabitants, and in doing so draws from Saraha's social criticism. Like Saraha, for example, Rangjung Dorjé focuses on the deeds of social groups rather than individuals. But unlike Saraha, all the people Rangjung Dorjé criticizes are Buddhists. In this song, for example, he speaks of the "spiritual friends" who head monastic communities, the Great Completion's "great meditators"; the new tantras' *tāntrika*s; and the patrons of all three other groups, the local lay people.

As his social divisions make clear, Rangjung Dorjé paid much more attention to Tibet's religious communities than to its householders. He makes little effort to criticize lay society, reasoning that the only way its members could improve their situation was to pursue a religious vocation. His primary criticism of Tibet's religious communities is, furthermore, that they are like its wider society; they are enmeshed in family loyalties and petty feuds.

Rangjung Dorjé's criticism also differs from Saraha's censure by adding an introduction and conclusion that somewhat soften it. He begins by making a connection between the bad deeds he is about to describe and the general corruption of these "dark times." And he ends by acknowledging his own faults and, therefore, his own need for improvement, a self-depreciation that is strikingly absent in the songs attributed to Saraha. The body of the song reads:

I cannot gauge others' minds in these dark times
When the teachings are declining,
But this is a little of what I have seen.

[I have seen] "spiritual friends" who advertise[28] greatness,
But swayed by careless laziness,
Sink into the mud of wealth and fame,
And get obsessed by the taste of meat and beer.
Doesn't this hurt the teachings?

[I have seen] "great meditators" who advertise meditation,
But get carried away by materialistic days,
And overpowered by slumber each night;
Morning and night, they chase pleasure and food.
Diverted in this way, will their mindstreams be freed?

[I have seen] power-loving *tāntrika*s,
Reliant on brave babbling.
Don't those who hurt others
Keep their own mindstreams burning?

[I have seen] patrons desperate for wealth and fame,
Who do not develop vivid trust.
Don't those who behave badly
Fall to the three lower realms?

My sad mind has encouraged me
To talk in this way.
If no one else listens,
I will tell you, the empty sky.

Right now, come what may,
I must not get distracted by material things,
And as the sacred gurus instruct,
Single-pointedly develop experience.[29]

Some of the bitterness in this song may reflect the relative failure of Rangjung Dorjé's trip to Kampo Nénang and the surrounding region. His predecessor Karma Pakshi had lived in the area for many years. He had begun his monastic career at Kaḥtog Monastery, a Nyingma monastery farther north in Kham. Kaḥtog Monastery was primarily associated with the "spoken word" (*bka' ma*) lineage of the Nyingma tradition, which transmitted the early translations of Buddhist texts as opposed to the treasure tradition, with which Rangjung Dorjé was more closely aligned. Karma Pakshi left Kaḥtog Monastery with his teacher Pomdrakpa, as a young man, probably to escape Mongol raids, and they traveled around southern Kham. After Pomdrakpa had died, Karma Pakshi went to live near Khawa Karpo, at Mount Pungri for eleven years, and reportedly amassed hundreds of students during this time. It was also while staying at Mount Pungri that he accumulated enough resources to begin repairs at the nearby Kampo Nénang, which had become derelict after Düsum Khyenpa's death.[30]

Rangjung Dorjé's journey to the area was inspired by his predecessor and appears to have been an attempt to reconnect with the area and its people. But his mediation at Kolti was his only major success. Unlike many of the other places he stayed, even his contribution to the region's cultural geography is unclear.

Two site guides (*gnas yig*) to Khawa Karpo that are attributed to "Rangjung Dorjé" are a *Secret Guide to Khawa Karpo* and a *Rain of Siddhi: A Site Guide for the Great Sacred Site*

Khawa Karpo.[31] But doubts about their authorship are so well established that they were not included within Rangjung Dorjé's *Collected Works*. Rangjung Dorjé's

FIGURE 7.1 Mount Khawa Karpo. Photograph by Ruth Gamble, 2009.

Liberation Story in Verse notes that he traveled there after meeting the mountain's god, but it says little else. The only certain clue to his relationship with the mountain is a praise that he wrote to it (which was included within his *Collected Works*), which is written in the same style as his other praises to places and contains a colophon that says he wrote it in 1308, at the same time he was traveling in the area. It is called *Adorning Mount Meru*, and in its reimagining of the site, its central themes are time and space and the relationship between them.

The transformation of Khawa Karpo begins in the first verse, by presenting an idea that comes to prominence from this point on in Rangjung Dorjé's poetic compositions. This idea is that not all places exist in the same eras; some isolated places, he suggests, can be protected from the general darkness of their times through their isolation. As Rangjung Dorjé explains it, this idea first came to him in a vision he had of Orgyenpa, in which his teacher told him that the Buddha himself had praised isolated places for this capacity in several of his sūtras.[32] Rangjung Dorjé's job, as Orgyenpa explained it and he understood it, was to recognize exactly where these sites were and to encourage their use. In the first verse of his praise to Khawa Karpo, he marks it as such a place.

> In these dark times, bodhisattvas
> Gaining experience in *siddhi*'s [realization's] essence
> Should rely on solitude to help these endeavors.
> This claim accords with the sūtras, whose words directly praise those
> Who abide in sacred sites like rocky mountains and vast borderlands.[33]

After establishing this general principle, the song then uses multiple traditions of cultural geography to establish the region's specialness. It begins by claiming that Khawa Karpo is one of "the twenty-four sites," or *pīṭha*, that are associated with the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*. As chapter 4 explained, this tantra's subjugation myth portrays these sites as the twenty-four places in which Cakrasamvara and his consort Vajravārāhī defeated the demonic gods Bhairava and Kālī, and in so doing replaced what were demonic *maṇḍalas* with awakened *maṇḍalas*. By the time Rangjung Dorjé arrived at Khawa Karpo, three of Tibet's sacred mountains had already been re-visioned as *pīṭha*: Tsari as Cārita (or sometimes Devīkoṭṭa), Lachi as Godāvarī ,and Kailash as Himavat. This praise claims, therefore, the same status for Khawa Karpo that these central Tibetan mountains enjoyed.

After beginning with this claim, the praise then shifts in the third verse to a wider—and less specifically tantric—perspective. It reads:

> An ocean of lotuses radiate moonlight, from which
> Mount Meru and the four continents [stick up like] shining anthers.

The *vajra* seat with its excellent elixir, the dharma,
Sits at the center of all virtue in Jambudvīpa.
But to its north, in the snowy mountains,
Is the greatest sacred site for *siddhi*;
Scholar-adepts rely on it. It is a site for exalted abilities.
It is the snowy, eastern Mount Potalaka.[34]

The image of mountains and continents sticking up "like anthers" at the beginning of this verse could refer to Khawa Karpo and its surrounding peaks, or it could be mapping a wider Buddhist cosmography. Following this image, the verse situates Khawa Karpo as Mount Potalaka on the southern continent, Jambudvīpa, which roughly coincides with the Tibetans' and Indians' known world. It then links it to Bodhgayā in India, the "*vajra* seat," where all buddhas are said to attain awakening. The name the verse gives Khawa Karpo is Mount Potalaka, the pure land of Avalokiteśvara, after which the Potala Palace was later named.[35] In the next verse, he then goes on to further position the mountain in relation to a range of place names found in the Abhidharma, pure land, and tantra traditions; some are historical sites some are not.

To its north is the country known as Khotan,
In it is Mount Gośṛṇga, blessed by the Buddha.
To its south is the land of Gṛhadevatā, which
Has been visited by many bodhisattvas.
To its east, is the country known as Gandhāra,
Protected by Enārpattra [Pomegranate Leaf], king of the *nāga*s.
To its west is the land of Boghavān, where
Confidence in the Buddha's teachings grows.

The positioning of these sites seems quite random. Khotan is a historical kingdom that once lay to the northwest of Khawa Karpo, in the south of present-day Xinjiang. According to at least one Mahāyāna Buddhist scripture, the Buddha visited its Mount Gośṛṇga during his lifetime.[36] Gṛhadevatā (Land of Household Deities) is one of the twenty-four *pīṭha*. In the commentaries on the *Cakrasamvara Tantra* that discuss the twenty-four *pīṭha*, it is most often associated with Khotan.[37] Gandhāra is the ancient Buddhist kingdom that was located in the region of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. The *nāga* king Enārpattra has a recurring role in the Mahāyāna Buddhist sūtras that developed in this region.[38] The last country mentioned in the list, Boghavān (Land of Enjoyment), is the name given to the series of islands said to rim the ocean that surrounds Jambudvīpa in every direction but north.

In the next verse, the praise focuses in on one type of geographic marker, the *pīṭha*, and then claims to locate one of them, Pretapurī (City of Ghosts),[39] at Khawa Karpo.

> East of the center, of Bodhgayā, is the *pīṭha*
> The *siddha*s rely upon, the site from which
> The goddesses who embody desire [Devīkoṭṭa] arise.
> In the north is the Kāmarūpa *pīṭha*.
> Between them is the *pīṭha* of
> Pretapurī, with all the attributes of a sacred site.
> This is a site for *siddhi*s in dark times; it is difficult
> For all to reach; it is where mother *ḍākinī*s live . . .[40]

This verse not only aligns Khawa Karpo with Pretapurī but positions it in relation to two other *pīṭha*: Devīkoṭṭa (Tsari)[41] to its east and Kāmarūpa to its north.[42] The use of these two sites as reference points aligns Khawa Karpo within another directional schema: the division of the twenty-four *pīṭha* into those located in space and associated with the mind, those located on earth and associated with speech, and those located underground and associated with the body. In this schema, Devikoṭa is associated with the first group, Kāmarūpa with the second, and Pretapurī with the third. [43]

In the following verses, the praise builds on this image of Khawa Karpo as *pīṭha* and, therefore, a Cakrasamvara/Vajravārāhī *maṇḍala* by describing the *maṇḍala*'s four guardians. To its east is Dorjé Drakdül (Vajra Rock Conqueror) and his entourage. His abode is described as being particularly difficult to reach, because up there

> Waterfalls crash, yell, and shake through chasms.
> The mountains are just rocks, but they look like weapons.
> Terrifying forests are splendid decorations,
> And at their center is a
> Beautiful alpine meadow,
> A dharma source, exquisitely shaped,
> And graced by a pool.[44]

The other cardinally directed protectors are said to be just as fierce and endowed with environments that evoke a similar mixture of terror and the sublime. To the south are the dancing skeletons known as *citipati* ("site guardians"), who have fearsome implements and are renowned for "their entourage of 100 000 divine

armies."[45] After this, Rangjung Dorjé departs from the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*'s script. The protector to the west is "the blood-red-colored *bse* with braided hair, surrounded by ten million [other] mother deities who have transcended ordinariness."[46] The *bse* is a class of deity described in the *Kīlaya Tantra* of the Nyingma tradition.[47] To the north, he positions a *yakṣa* known as Drella Gawa (Mule Friend). The *yakṣa* are a class of deity associated with the protection of wealth and are said to be the attendants of Vaiśravaṇa, the north-quarter guard from among the four guardian gods. Like Rangjung Dorjé's eclectic collection of sacred sites in the earlier verse, this is a strange collection of beings that are not aligned with any traditional presentation or visualization practice. The *maṇḍala* at whose center Khawa Karpo sits is a hybrid *maṇḍala*.[48]

After establishing this hybrid *maṇḍala*, the praise then moves back to the more standard format of Rangjung Dorjé's praises to places and begins to describe the sacred beings who have previously visited the site. If he had wanted to, Rangjung Dorjé could have described the years that his predecessor Karma Pakshi spent nearby in retreat at Mount Pungri.[49] But instead, he chose a more famous tale that was concurrently being promoted by the treasure tradition in their retelling of Vairocana's (eighth century) life story.

According to this developing hagiographical tradition, Vairocana was not only a (more historically verifiable) renowned imperial-era translator and one of the first seven monks to take ordination (along with Rangjung Dorjé's previous incarnation as Gyel Chokyang), he was also another one of Padmasambhava's twenty-five close disciples. At one point, nevertheless, he was banished from the royal court in Lhasa after a woman accused him of indecency, and others suggested his Great Completion teachings were not Buddhist. In exile in the Tsawarong Ranges, which include Khawa Karpo, he is said to have converted the local king to Buddhism and been visited in a vision by his teacher Padmasambhava.[50] The two lines in which Rangjung Dorjé evokes this story read:

> It is widely reported that long ago Ācārya Padmasambhava
> And the guru Vairocana visited this site.[51]

Rangjung Dorjé's conjuring of Vairocana is not only reminiscent of his other praises to places, but it is also another iteration of his lifelong relationship with the treasure tradition. Karma Pakshi and his associates from Kaḥtog Monastery were proponents of the other Nyingma tradition, the "spoken word" (*bka' ma*) lineage. More work needs to be done to establish the exact relationship between Kaḥtog and Karma Pakshi, and whether or not they worked together or independently in southern Kham. But they certainly were not promoting the treasure tradition in

the region like Rangjung Dorjé's praise did. Rangjung Dorjé's choice to highlight links between the treasure tradition and Khawa Karpo is yet another example of how the sites associated with the Karmapas accommodated their differences and preserved their often-discordant narratives. After their time, for example, despite their variant approaches to the site and the very different receptions in the region, their individual contributions to Khawa Karpo's sanctification have latterly been treated as one event.[52]

At the time, however, the differences between the two Karmapas' experiences in the region was quite stark. The reaction of this district's inhabitants to Rangjung Dorjé suggests they were unimpressed by his claim to be Karma Pakshi's rebirth. It seems like it took the reincarnation tradition longer to establish itself in some parts of Tibet than others.

PASSING THROUGH THE CENTER

Rangjung Dorjé returned to Central Tibet from Khawa Karpo when he heard news of Orgyenpa's death. In the *Liberation Story in Verse*, he wrote that he was informed of Orgyenpa's death by a vision he experienced at Khawa Karpo. In this vision, he saw Orgyenpa directly and continually all the way through sunrise, but as "a sign of [Orgyenpa's] degeneration, he appeared as if reflected in a mirror."[53] Determined to fulfill his guru's wishes by studying the *Kālacakra Tantra* with Künga Özer, he left Khawa Karpo in late 1308 and traveled to his teacher's elder student in Nyédo.

His account of a vision series continues after this. First, he describes how Nyenchen Tanglha and other local deities came to greet him as he crossed the border between Kham and central Tibet. To him, they appeared grand and detailed, but his entourage only saw mist and clouds descend on the road. Then, when he arrived back at Tsurpu, the local guardian *ḍākinī*s greeted him with a dance performance. After a short stay, he traveled to Lhasa, where he offered a bejeweled parasol to the famous Jowo statue in the central Jokhang Temple and simultaneously experienced a vision of "all the buddhas in the ten directions."[54]

Following these visions, he traveled to Nyédo to study with Künga Özer, and while he was there, his friend arranged for a succession of teachers to instruct him. These included the Kagyü teachers Tsültrim Rinchen and Jñānaśrī, along with Kumārarāja (1266–1343), who, in response to Rangjung Dorjé's description of his profound vision at Karma, taught him the *Ḍākinīs' Heart-Essence* texts from the treasure tradition.[55]

This last teacher is only mentioned in passing in Rangjung Dorjé's writing, but a brief survey of Kumārarāja's own liberation story suggests many lineal, temporal,

and geographic connections between the two. Kumārarāja, for example, is said to have traveled to Tsurpu and studied with two of its—and Rangjung Dorjé's—main teachers: Lama Nyenré and Darma. This suggests a link not only between Kumārarāja and Tsurpu, but also, inversely, between Tsurpu and the treasure tradition. Kumārarāja also visited Orgyenpa in South Latö and met Rangjung Dorjé when he was a young boy.[56]

Rangjung Dorjé's sojourn at Nyédo was interrupted by a summons to Tsel Monastery, where he was required to officiate at the ceremonies following the death of the eighth Tsel myriarch, and Orgyenpa's old sparring partner, Gawé Pel in 1309.[57] After this, he retreated to the cave he formerly inhabited at the base of Jomo Gangkar, at the top of the Nyé Valley.[58] In retreat, he experienced a visionary dream that would profoundly affect the rest of his life. But unlike his other life-changing visions, this was of a place rather than of a deity: Kongpo in southern Tibet. "I was staying in solitude at Jomo Gangkar," he reported in the *Liberation Story in Verse,* "when I dreamt I saw all Kongpo's people aspiring to practice the sacred dharma. I understood I could help them. And as it turned out, I have helped many of them.[59]

FIRST JOURNEY TO TSARI

Following this vision, Rangjung Dorjé spent the next three years in Kongpo and most of the rest of his life trying to return there. This mountainous region in southern Tibet appealed to him for several reasons. Environmentally, he appreciated its green forests, high peaks, and inaccessible valleys. Politically, he described himself as feeling relatively free of Mongol influence, and its local rulers were friendly to him. After the 1290 Drigung rebellion, the Mongol armies had invaded and established control there, but their influence was nominal. It was also the home of Mount Tsari, which he understood to be the Plateau's most sacred site.

Rangjung Dorjé's account of his first trip to Kongpo reads very much like a pilgrimage. Characteristically, the *Liberation Story in Verse* only outlines the trip, but the twelve songs he composed on his travels add much detail to this simple narrative. The information provided by these two sources suggests he traveled to Kongpo via Daklha Gampo Monastery and only approached Tsari after a visionary directive to travel there from Gampopa.[60] Unlike Mount Khawa Karpo, the Tsari region had already been thoroughly sanctified, maṇḍalized, and colonized by the time Rangjung Dorjé arrived there. To all those who lived there, at least, it was understood to be the mind *maṇḍala* of Cakrasamvara/Vajravārāhī, the site of two celestial *pīṭha*s Cārita and Devīkoṭṭa—and prized real estate.

As explained in the traditional history of the site that Rangjung Dorjé inherited, the presence of these deities in the region had only become known in stages. The process of realizing their presence was described as the "opening of this [*maṇḍala*'s] doors." Padmasambhava had been the first to enter. According to the treasure tradition, he had entered through the southern door, added the region to his many subjugated territories, and discovered the divine *maṇḍala* at its center. Later, his student Vimalamitra—the Great Perfection adept who had dissolved into Rangjung Dorjé's forehead in his vision at Karma— entered through the same door.[61] Following this, a stalwart of the new tantras, one of the eighty-four *mahāsiddha*s, Kambala (eleventh century), also reportedly visited the site through the southern door.[62]

Later Tibetan adventurers built upon these initial exploratory (and probably legendary) journeys. The first was a student of Gampopa named Kyebu Yeshé Dorjé (twelfth century), who traveled down from nearby Gampo Monastery three times on Gampopa's orders before finding his way to the region's most sacred body of water, Lake Yutso (Turquoise Lake), and therefore "opening the western door."[63] As a student of Gampopa, Kyebu Yeshé Dorjé is presented as a generic Kagyü practitioner. All later arrivals were more distinctly aligned with the various Kagyü sublineages.

The first of these were students of the influential Drigung founder, Jikten Gönpo (1143–1217), who opened the northwestern door and subsequently established a hermitage at the base of the region's central peak, Mount Dakpo Shelri (Pure Crystal Mountain). This group was also the first to find a circumambulation route around Dakpo Shelri, which they recognized as the central mansion of Cakrasamvara/Vajravārāhī's *maṇḍala*. This central transformation was accompanied by the peripheral establishment of the cardinally directed doors, which were then assigned guardians, establishing both its center (*dkyil*) and boundary (*'khor*), and completing the process of maṇḍalization.

As they created this circuit on the ground, they dedicated much ink and ritual to its figurative transformation.[64] This transformation, in turn, provided the model for Rangjung Dorjé's cultural landscaping of both the Karma Kagyü Monasteries and Khawa Karpo. By using this model in these other places, he ensured that his other projects were linked to both Tsari and the wider network of sacred sites to which it belonged, particularly the two other Cakrasamvara mountains, Lachi and Kailash.

After the Drigung lineage had been established at Tsari, other Kagyü traditions developed their own relationships with the region. Another cultural landscaper to visit the region was Tsangpa Gyaré (1161–1211), the founder of the Drugpa Kagyü, who visited the area, subdued a few demons, and opened the doors to several

smaller, auxiliary *maṇḍala*s. These included the Vajrayoginī *maṇḍala* at Lake Yutso that reportedly manifests to those with wisdom.[65] His student Götsangpa—Orgyenpa's teacher and Künga Özer's previous incarnation—also visited the area, performing further acts of subduing and opening. During his stay, he was even said to have conducted a battle with the great Indian god Brahmā whom he bound at Namkhapuk Cave (Sky Cave).[66] Eventually, practitioners from Tsel and Pakmodru also made their way to Tsari. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Rangjung Dorjé's teacher, the Nyingma treasure revealer and Kagyü practitioner Kumārarāja, had established a hermitage at the nearby New Tsari.[67] There were many lineages in the sacred site, but they did not always get along.

Indeed, despite its sacredness, the Tsari to which Rangjung Dorjé traveled in 1312 was experiencing problems. First, the region was still badly affected by the Mongol invasion of Kongpo that had followed the Drigung rebellion of 1290. Until that point, the Drigung had been the dominant force in Kongpo, but their defeat had restricted their influence. Other Kagyü lineages soon filled the resulting power vacuum. This led to underlying tensions that continued throughout Rangjung Dorjé's stay and erupted between Druk and Tsel yogis in the generation after his death.[68] Sacred real estate, it seems, was worth fighting over.

On his arrival in the region, Rangjung Dorjé composed a song that reflects these tensions and his efforts to establish his influence in the region. It is the first of his songs to declare his virtues forcefully and directly. It reads in part:

> This Vajra [Dorjé] that realizes nonduality has a message, a rosary of ideas,
> For *dhārmika*s in the ten directions: Don't be distracted. Think well. And
> Send this message to those whose know how to listen . . .[69]
>
> I have left lust's residence and arrived at the site of great bliss.
> Send this message to the passionate, tell them Rangjung Dorjé sent it . . .
>
> Others do not look down on me as I have worked a long time for peace;
> This is the illusory play of helping others that is known as the greatest patience.
> Send this message to the healthy, tell them Rangjung Dorjé sent it.
>
> I've been caught on nails of passing pain while resting, moving, eating, and sleeping.
> But as liberation helpfully eliminates [these nails], know that I'm now free of them.
> Send this message to the diligent, tell them Rangjung Dorjé sent it . . .

Famous, wealthy patrons, those who "uphold the Vinaya" but not their vows,
Teachers who yearn for renown, "great meditators" who cultivate stupidity—
I call them [all] "try-hards who don't get results"; Tell them Rangjung Dorjé said so.[70]

Rangjung Dorjé sang this song at a *gaṇacakra* held at Langong Monastery, on the road between Old and New Tsari. Following his retreats and teachings in central Tibet, this song marks a new confidence in Rangjung Dorjé's songs and a more intricate compositional style. This newfound confidence is also evident in many of the other songs that he composed during his stay at Tsari. In these, rather than berating himself for his own shortcomings as he had in many of his earlier songs, he encourages and admonishes his audience.

His primary exhortative technique in these songs is the juxtaposition of his audience's external environment and their internal thoughts, and he sets up this dichotomy is several ways. He points out the fundamental incongruence between peoples' expectations about and experiences of *saṃsāra*—for example; the "strangeness" discussed in the previous chapter. The clearest example of this technique in his Tsari songs is the following verse:

When you do not know your own body's solitude, an outer solitude is not much use.
When you do not know your mind is a guru, a so-called "guru" is not much use.
When you do not know appearances are texts too, black inky letters are not much use . . .
When you do not know everything is in mind, places, outside and in, are not much use.

If you don't stop craving sweet, delicious food, an empty *gaṇa* [*cakra*] is not much use.
If you don't mix your mind with dharma, pointless vows are not much use.
If you don't harmonize with dharma's tenor, melodious songs are not much use.[71]

He composed the next song as he and his followers walked to another of Tsari's sacred sites: the Pé Puk, or the Lotus Cave. This song develops the theme of

deprivation that was briefly expressed in the previous song, and in doing so it gives a clearer sense of the difficulties he and his followers faced in traveling around this infamously precipitous and precipitating region. The song, which was quoted at the beginning of chapter 4, reads in part:

> When the fog of ignorance clears, you won't mind haze outside.
> When the sun of wisdom rises, you won't mind sunsets outside.[72]
> When the rains of preconceptions cease, you won't mind it pouring outside.
> When you realize *saṃsāra* is a cliff, you won't mind rugged chasms outside.
> When there are no more thorns of hate, you won't mind pointed barbs.
> When the streams of craving dry up, you won't mind churning rivers.
> When the peaks of pride are leveled, you won't mind high mountains outside.
> When you taste a meal of *samādhi*, you won't mind flavorless food.
> When the afflictions' jungle ravines are cleared, you won't mind gloomy gorges.[73]

These songs are strikingly different from the other, more decorative images of Tsari found in praises to it. Rather than resembling his visionary transformation of Khawa Karpo, they are much more like the songs he composed at Lha Teng about the difficulties of life in retreat. One of Rangjung Dorjé's songs from the period even seems to reflect on the difference between the literary descriptions of these sacred sites and the actuality of practicing yoga within them.

> We have fled here to this solitude, this sacred site,
> But a thief has chased us: our preconceptions, subjects, and objects.
> If we don't meet this thief with a craving-free mind,
> It won't matter where we are sitting.[74]

As he and his audience got used to Tsari, his songs begin to combine these two variant perceptions of the environment. These songs also coincide with his move from Old Tsari, with its competitive sublineages, to New Tsari, where there was more space for him and his followers to do retreats. The songs continue to juxtapose difficult external conditions with positive internal transformation, but they do so in developing ways. In one song composed at New Tsari's Trashi Jong, for example, he suggests that not only will the often-difficult environment influence

his and his audience's minds positively, but they can also see a reflection of their subtle body in it. It reads in part:

> It is very difficult for people to travel here to this special place, this most sacred site.
> Here in Jambudvīpa's north, in Tibet, it is surrounded by rocky mountains, *vajras*; and
> Sundry waterfalls cascade from them in all directions.
>
> But it is infused with the bouquet of green trees and flowers,
> So gods, demigods, *kinnaras*,[75] and elemental spirits all make offerings here.
> Externally it has the aspect of a *maṇḍala*; internally it is a site of self-arising deities . . .
>
> With all the limbs they branch into,
> The body's channels are the forest and its decorations,
> The senses are its flowers and its fruits.

Later in the same song, he goes further, suggesting an alignment between Tsari's environment and the innate nature of their minds, or innateness. The verse that expresses this most clearly is the following:

> Actual innateness is inside, at Cakrasamvara's actual sacred site: our mind.
> When we see this directly, we will see self-arising Tsari.[76]

All Rangjung Dorjé's writing from this period suggests that he wanted to stay in Tsari and establish a series of hermitages there. Before he could finish his work there, however, he was forced to move out of the mountains and take shelter in central Tibet. This time, it was not hostile locals or the death of his guru that forced him back into the center, but his health. It would be over a decade before he could return.

AT THE FEET OF GIANTS

Although Rangjung Dorjé does not mention the event in his writing, some later redactors of his story have suggested that just before he left Tsari on his first trip there, he became a treasure revealer. Tséwang Gyel's *Lhorong Dharma History* is the earliest extant text to include this episode. It says:

> In the female water ox year [1313], thanks to his relationship with the Guru [Padmasambhava], he retrieved the *Ḍākinīs' Heart-Essence* treasure in Lhodrag. It was written on golden paper. He then spent three months at the intersection of the Lung River [and a tributary] in Tsari praying intensely to Padmasambhava, before meeting him directly and receiving empowerment and transmission from him.[77]

As the Lung River runs through Lhodrag just to the west of Tsari, the insertion of this episode into Rangjung Dorjé's story is—narratively speaking—possible. Indeed, there is a gap between the end of his stay at Tsari and the next episode of his stories and songs, which occurs at Yarlha Shampo midway through the next year. As a person with a particular devotion to Padmasambhava and a lifelong involvement in the treasure tradition, especially the *Ḍākinīs' Heart-Essence* cycle of texts, Rangjung Dorjé is also just the kind of person who would be expected to find such a treasure text or believe he had found one. But if he did experience this he did not make a record of it. His decision may have been, as Tséwang Gyel argues, because it was such an important secret he did not write it down. But it could also be read as evidence for this text's *later* attribution to him. As with many other elements of the treasure tradition, the source of the *Ḍākinīs' Heart-Essence* texts is shrouded in mystery.

What is certain, however, is that something happened to Rangjung Dorjé during this intervening period; the person who resurfaces at Mount Yarlha Shampo six months later on his way from Tsari to Tsurpu is not the confident, healthy yogi he had been. No reason was given for his departure from Tsari, and there was no description of his travel to Yarlha Shampo. All the reader was told is that he has experienced "obstacles" to his yoga practice. The first verse of the song he composed at Yarlha Shampo reflected this. It is one of the least confident of all his compositions, and it reads:

> *Kye ma!* Since the beginning of beginningless *saṃsāra*,
> The power of my generosity has been so weak,
> The force of my morality so feeble that
> All this long time, I, a beggar have wandered,
> Clouds of noble persons have taught me the pure dharma,
> And still, I have not destroyed my doubts.[78]

Along with the mental afflictions he describes in the verse, the colophon also reveals that he was physically very unwell. "He had become very ill," it says, "and thought he might depart to another realm [i.e., die]."[79]

The *Liberation Story in Verse* describes this moment as a crisis too, but with hindsight, also as a moment of profound transformation. It was only when Rangjung Dorjé became very ill, it suggests, that he was granted a vision of profound interdependence and as a result vowed to help others more determinedly. The text also describes how Yarlha Shampo helped him to recover mentally and physically. This neat narrative is disturbed somewhat, however, by the colophon of a song written months later at Mount Jomo Gangkar. This time he thanks this mountain spirit for helping him to resolve a "fault in [his] life-force."[80] Further evidence for his ill health can also be found in his decision, following these visions, to stay in central Tibet for the next ten years and lead a more subdued life teaching and writing.

For the first few of these years, he lived at Trashi Sarma Hermitage near Tsurpu, which had been the home of his mentor Darma. It was there at Trashi Sarma in 1314 that he collated and wrote the *Birth Stories of the Teacher*.[81] And, following a vision in which he saw each astrological house as a reflection of his subtle body, he went on to compose his most influential treatise on astrology and calendars.[82] Later, in 1319, he built his own hermitage in the hills near Tsurpu, naming it Déchen Teng, perhaps after the monastery with the same name that Götsangpa had built near Bütra and in which he had stayed as a young child. During his extended stay at Déchen Teng, he composed still more texts, including his most famous work, the *Profound Inner Meaning*, in 1322, and, toward the end of his stay there in 1324, the first section of his *Liberation Story in Verse*.

Despite his possible ill health and focus on composition at this time, he still found time to make a few short journeys, during which he performed a few more demon subjugations and composed several more landscaping songs, which is to say songs that reimagined the environment, changing its cultural geography.

The most vivid demon-subjugating episode from this period begins in the cave at Jomo Gangkar when he returned there to set up a statue of Padmasambhava. While there, he had a vision in which he saw that "the awakened activity of the scholar of Oḍḍiyāna [Padmasambhava] still needed to be performed in every direction, even in [those] days."[83] In particular, he became aware of a group of "low class" people who were engaged in a destructive custom nearby. Rangjung Dorjé does not provide any details about their depravities, but Tsuglag Trengwa suggests that they were sacrificing a variety of animals— everything from wild yaks to sparrows—to a local malevolent ghost.[84] Confronted with this practice, Rangjung Dorjé decided that rather than magic, learning, or wrath, "the luminosity of Śākyamuni's compassion would dispel their obscurations."[85] In practice, this meant that he spent months there teaching the locals Buddhism, until, all the

sources agree, not only the region's humans but also the ghost himself converted and vowed to help others.[86]

His most intensive landscaping-through-literature project from this period was focused on Mount Jomo Kharak, which rises between the Yarlung Tsangpo River and Yardrogtso Lake, next to the main road between Lhasa and Zhigatsé. It is not clear why Rangjung Dorjé traveled to this place, or why he invested it with so much literature, but it was associated with one of his past lives as Potowa, whose student Kharak Gomchung came from there.

On one of Rangjung Dorjé's journeys to Jomo Kharak, in 1319, he composed four short praises to this mountain in each of its cardinal directions. These songs contain much environmental imagery, including, in the song sung at East Kharak, a description of Tibet as "the heights from which pure rivers descend."[87] The image of Tibet as the head of rivers is found throughout the Dunhuang documents and suggests a link to very old conceptions of the Tibetan environment.[88] Another of the songs, the one sung at North Kharak, expands even further on this already broad geographic outlook in the following verses:

> Up in this group of snowy mountains, this lotus cluster,
> We are surrounded by Jambudvīpa's great ocean.
> Up here bright, sweet waterfalls sparkle, refreshing all,
> Both those who taste the water and those who imagine it . . .
>
> [Above] the beautiful, pervasive sky
> With its delightful star-rosary covers all.
> And I wonder if the wisdom realizing
> Emptiness pervades all wanderers the same way.[89]

LOSING THE CENTER

Throughout this and other similar works, there is much evidence that while Rangjung Dorjé's focus during this time may have been more on the works that established his reputation, he did not completely suspend his environmental re-visioning project and the positioning of the Karmapas' tradition that was associated with it.

Moreover, as the decade progressed, his writing became increasingly focused on two life goals: on the one hand, his longing for wildernesses and retreat, represented by his nature-focused writing, leads him into the mountains; on the other hand, his developing reputation as a teacher, writer, and reincarnated Karmapa, with many people to serve and influence, pulls him back into the center. This tension is expressed in many of his songs from this period but perhaps most

acutely in the following verses, where he directly contemplates the idea of centers and borderlands:

> My mind pervades the sky's expanse, and its apparent
> Emptiness arises as Samantabhadra's projections;
> I honor and bow, and honor and bow to
> The [mind] that is not restricted nor localized.[90]
> Through direct, wise awareness [I perceive]
> No edge [and] no center; space extends.[91]

This verse suggests he has overcome the need to seek out borderlands and retreat. However, in a song composed around the same time, he reflects on the importance of isolation for yoga practice. It reads:

> Depend on borderlands, mountains, solitudes;
> Get to the vital point of the skillful path, its channels, and subtle energies.
> Cultivate *dhyāna* constantly, without distraction.[92]

The next and last chapter of Rangjung Dorjé's life became a balancing act between these two opposing forces. But, from the perspective of the reincarnation tradition's development, both of these aspects of his life's journey were essential. Without his growing reputation as a mountain hermit unsullied by clan politics, he would probably not have been invited to the Yuan court, and his work creating retreat centers outside the maelstrom of central Tibetan politics was also essential to the development of the Karma Kagyü lineage. At the same time, however, his work as a teacher and writer in central Tibet, along with the political and social connections he made from these activities, did much to enhance his growing reputation and establish Tsurpu, Dechen Teng, and the other sites associated with him as zones of relative safety. To further establish the Karmapa tradition and institution, he needed to work at both the center and edges of Tibetan and Mongolian society.

NOTES

1. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 73.5–6; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 243.5.

2. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 30.5–6; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 276.5. The verse that follows this is quoted at the beginning of chapter 3.

3. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 388; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 98; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 365.

4. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 388.

5. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 32.3–4; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 209.4–5.

6. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 39.4–5; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 215.4–5.

7. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 39.5–6; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 215.6–216.1.

8. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 40.1–40.2; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 216.1–2.

9. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 40.3–6; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 216.2–5.

10. The Tibetan word *'khyer*, which is usually translated as "carry," is here translated as "brush" to reflect the movement of banners.

11. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 36.5–7; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 213.2–4.

12. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 930; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 365.

13. This site is spelled in several different ways: *Lha stengs, Lha stangs*, and *Lha steng*.

14. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 388. This suggests there may have been a focus on Bka' brgyud practices at Mtshur phu and Rnying ma practices at Karma Monastery, but I have not found any further evidence to back up this claim.

15. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 48.4–6; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 222.6.

16. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 931. This story is also retold in Si tu Pan chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 366.

17. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 389.

18. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 47.5; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 222.2.

19. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 389.

20. Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 367.

21. Kam po gnas nang Monastery still exists, but since the seventeenth century it has been a Dge lugs monastery aligned with the large monastery in nearby Li thang.

22. The first Karmapa's visit to the area is described in Gzhon nu byang chub, *Re'u mig brga rtsa brgyad pa*, 91–92. The second Karmapa's visit is in Karma pak shi, *Bka' 'bum*, 93–95.

23. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 390.

24. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 390.

25. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 390.

26. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 56.4–5; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 229.2.

27. *Tshigs bcad ma* describes his adventures at Kha ba dkar po before those at Kam po gnas nang and Kol ti: *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 389, 390. The songs' colophons, however, suggest he traveled first to Kam po gnas nang, then to Kol ti, and then on to Kha ba dkar po: *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 54–56; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*, 226–229; Rang byung rdo rje, *Kha ba dkar po'i bstod pa*, 49–53. Today, there are no villages in the region called Kol ti, but several have similar names, including Gongziding and Gongpo.

28. This is a translation of the Tibetan word *'dod pa*. This word has several meanings, including "to desire" and "to proclaim." As the verse following those in which it is used contains allusions to both meanings—"power-loving *tāntrikas*" and "brave babbling"—it seems to me that he might be trying to convey both senses of the word. I have chosen to focus on the proclamation aspect of it, as desiring is anyway implied in the rest of the verse. But as the meaning of this word in this song is more in line with the idea of "(false) advertising" than personal proclamation, I have translated it here as "advertising."

29. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 55.1–56.3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 226.1–229.1. Colophon: "Rang byung rdo rje wrote this song while he was negotiating an end to civil strife, on the 28th day of the 12th month of the sheep year [1307], at Kol ti Temple."

30. Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 34-35.

31. *Kha ba dkar po'i gsang yig* and *Gnas mchog kha ba dkar po'i bsang yig dngos grub char 'bebs*, in *Gnas chen kha ba dkar po'i bsang mchod dang gnas yig*, eds. Rin chen rdo rje and Tshe ring chos 'phel (Gyelthang, Yunnan: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2006), 8–9 and 1–7. Part of the reason for

the lack of clarity about these works is the competing claims on the site by two sanctification processes: one by branches of Kaḥtok Monastery and the other associated with the second and third Karmapas. The history is further tangled by Karma Pakshi's close association with Kaḥtok Monastery and the possibility that he wrote about this site using the name Rang byung rdo rje.

32. The details of this vision have been preserved in the letter and instruction cycle of *Rang byung rdo rje' gsung 'bum* in a text titled *U rgyan pa rmi lam du mjal lugs* (*The Way I Met Orgyenpa in a Dream*), vol. *ca*, 96–98. The lines discussing isolated places say, "If you can generate a powerful effort in dark times, if you can stay in isolated places and dedicate yourself to dharma, then even though these are dark times, your qualities will be clarified. As the Buddha praised them, these (sites) will help you transform." In many ways, this idea is a precedent for the idea of the "hidden land," or *sbas yul.* See chapter 5, note 34.

33. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *ca*, 49.

34. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *ca*, 49.

35. Lokesh Chandra examines the development of this myth in "Origin of the Avalokitesvara of Potala," *Kailash* 7, no. 1 (1979): 5–25. Toni Huber looks at the broader phenomenon of shifting holy sites in *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), and shows how Potalaka is most often positioned to the south of Bodhgayā: *The Holy Land Reborn*, 81–82.

36. This refers to the story told in the *Gośṛṇga-Vyākaraṇa* in which the Buddha Śākyamuni visited Khotan and drained the country of the sea by which it was covered.

37. Sugiki, "Holy Sites in Buddhist Saṃvara Cycle," 516.

38. Elāpattra/Elpatra/Erakapatta is mentioned in several Mahāyāna texts that originated in Gandhāra. Mark Allon (personal communication, November 2013) is working on text fragments that include a story about Elāpattra that originates in Gandhāra and links him with that region's ruling clans.

39. There is a tradition of associating this site with an area in western Tibet near 'Khyung lung Monastery, which lies about seventy-five kilometers west of Mount Kailash. See Matthieu Ricard, *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 346n64.

40. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *ca*, 49–50.

41. For more on this site, see: Huber, "Where Exactly Are Caritra, Devikota, and Himavat," 121–164. The Indian original is also the setting of a subjugation story starring the *mahāsiddha* Virūpa, about which Dowman writes, "The manner in which Virūpa converts the inhabitants of Devīkoṭṭa . . . and the phraseology employed, is reminiscent of the legends of Virūpa's contemporary siddha, Padmasambhava, converting the Bonpos and the gods of Tibet": *Masters of Mahāmudrā*, 51. Moreover, as David Templeman points out, Devīkoṭṭa was also the *pīṭha* where Kṛṣṇācārya was killed by the site's goddess: "Internal and External Geography in Spiritual Biography," in *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places in Tibetan Culture: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Toni Huber (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1999), 68–70.

42. Kāmarūpa was the name of a kingdom that existed in Assam, north of Bodhgayā, between 350 CE and 1140 CE. The area continued to be called Kāmarūpa for centuries after the kingdom's demise; see H. K Barpujari, ed., *The Comprehensive History of Assam* (Guwahati, India: Publication Board, Assam, 1990), vol. 1, 59–78. There is also, as Rang byung rdo rje indicates here, a goddess called Kāmarūpa, who is associated with the area, particularly the Kāmarūpa temple at Guwahati, Assam.

43. Those located in space are Skt. *khecarī* (Tib. *mkha' spyod kyi gnas*); those located on earth are Skt. *bhūcarī* (Tib. *sa spyod kyi gnas*), and those located underground are Skt. *pātāla-vāsinī* (Tib. *sa 'og gi gnas*).

44. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. ca, 50.

45. Rosemary Jones Tung includes a description and short history of these deities in *A Portrait of Lost Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 157. This deity is Vajrayoginī's protector, which is another form of Vajravārāhī and therefore associated with the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*.

46. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. ca, 50.

47. Robert Mayer, "Pelliot tibétain 349: A Dunhuang Tibetan Text on Rdo rje Phur pa," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 27, no. 1 (2004): 148, note 18.

48. The *maṇḍala* there also departs from the maṇḍalization project conducted at Tsa ri, in that those describing that central Tibetan region as a *maṇḍala* focused on its central mountain, Dag pa shel ri, as the central house of the *maṇḍala* rather than establishing its boundaries: see Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 39–57. But in that the site was associated with Rong btsan kha ba dkar po and is being reimagined as a Buddhist *maṇḍala*, it does fit with Katia Buffetrille's description of the process of "Buddhicization." She defines this as the transformation of a "mountain territorial god whom laymen worship once or twice a year on the slope of the mountain, into a Buddhist mountain holy place around which pilgrims perform a circumambulation": "Reflections on Pilgrimages," 21. She also notes that none of Tibet's mountains undergo this process in the same way or to the same degree. Some mountains, like the three Cakrasamvara *pīṭha* mountains of central Tibet, have been completely "Buddhicized" and "maṇḍalized." Others are only partially transformed and, therefore, support two variant approaches: an elite, literary representation of the mountain as a tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* and local, popular, older oral traditions.

49. Rang byung rdo rje may not mention this stay in this context, but he does highlight it in his version of Karma Pakshi's liberation story, *Bla ma rin po che'i rnam thar,* 254.

50. G.yu sgra snying po, *The Great Image: The Life Story of Vairochana the Translator*, trans. Ani Jinba Palmo (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2004), 145–192.

51. *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *ca*, 51.

52. Rin chen rdo rje and Tshe ring chos 'phel eds., *Kha ba dkar po'i gnas yig*, ii.

53. This is the same vision I discussed in note 31; it can therefore be found in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *ca*, 96–98.

54. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 390.

55. He is retaught these teachings by Ri khrod ras pa (Cotton-Clad Hermit), about whom I have not been able to find any information: *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 390.

56. Ron Garry, "Kumārarāja," *Treasury of Lives* (August 2007), http://www.treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Kumaradza/4043.

57. Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 372.

58. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 393; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 99; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 372.

59. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 393.

60. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 393; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 99; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 372.

61. Pad ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang pa pad dkar legs bshad,* in *Pad ma'i dkar po'i gsung 'bum,* vol. 4 (Darjeeling: Kargyud sungrab nyamso khang, 1973–1974), 214–282; this section is translated in Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 62–63.

62. Pad ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri*, 244. Translated in Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 63. La ba pa/Kambala was another *mahāsiddha* who was renowned for retrieving

sacred sites from non-Buddhist opponents in India; see Dowman, *Masters of Mahāmudrā*, 179–185).

63. Pad ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri*, 244–250; translated in Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 63–66.

64. Pad ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri*, 250–258; translated in Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 66–70.

65. Pad ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri*, 258–267; translated in Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 66–70.

66. Pad ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri*, 266; translated in Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 69. Götsangpa's journey to Tsa ri is also described in 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. *nya* 124b.

67. These events are described in 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. *ka*, 44a.

68. Pad ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri*, 258–267; translated in Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 66–70.

69. The lines until this point are not included within *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 62.

70. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 62.3–63.1; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 233.1–235.4.

71. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 69.2–70.2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 240.4–241.6.

72. This translation follows *Gsung mgur phyogs sdebs*, as the *Mgur rnam* states *nub kyang bgod*, which would mean "you will not establish" or "you will not laugh at" and seems to be a scribal error.

73. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 70.3–7; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 242.1–243.1.

74. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 71.2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 242.1.

75. *Kinnaras* (*ci*, also *shang shang*) are half-human, half-bird celestial musicians. They are also associated with the Kinnauri people of present-day Himachel Pradesh, India.

76. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 69.6; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 239.6.

77. Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 240.

78. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 154.2–3; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 376.3–4.

79. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 157.1–2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 378.4–5.

80. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 396.

81. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 91.7–92.1; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i'gur thor bu,* 257.4–5. It reads, "He sung this when he had finished composing the *Ston pa'i skyes rabs* in Bkra shis gsar ma, on the fifth day of the second month of the tiger year [1314]."

82. This vision is described in *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 394. Several small works included within *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum* deal with astrology; see vol. *a*, 579–616.

83. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 397.

84. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 933.

85. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 397–398.

86. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 933.

87. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 101.3–102.2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 265.2–5.

88. For descriptions of Tibet as the head of rivers in early Tibetan literature, see Brandon Dotson, "Complementarity and Opposition in Early Tibetan Ritual," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 128, no. 1 (2008): 41–67.

89. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 104.3–4; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 268.3.

90. "Not restricted nor localized" is my translation of the Great Completion term *gya chad phyogs lhung med pa*, which is a state associated with *sems sde* Great Completion practices.

91. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 128.5–7; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 291.6–292.1.

92. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 125.3–4; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 289.1–2. *Dhyāna* (Tib. *bsam gtan*) is a state of mind developed through meditation and yoga practice.

8

Between Kongpo and Xanadu

Words are wisdom, as are the spaces between them,
And that which is unutterable, it too is wisdom,
So, I, this *vajra* yogi at the end of time,
Have no need to take up or give up talking or silence.

Rangjung Dorjé, approximately 1325,
aged forty-two, Tsari[1]

According to his autobiography, the more established Rangjung Dorjé became in central Tibet, the more he encountered signs that he should leave. Even on the day he founded Déchen Teng Hermitage, he had a visionary dream that Avalokiteśvara told him to leave for Kongpo. "My luminosity radiates there," the bodhisattva told him, "and it is in accordance with the Karmapa's [Karma Pakshi's] prophecy [that you live there]."[2]

Rangjung Dorjé repeatedly writes about Kongpo during this time, but he does not go there. By this stage of his life and career, he was much in demand as a teacher and writer, and leaving central Tibet was a challenge. It was not until six years after this vision that he traveled to Kongpo. When he finally arrived there, he founded another hermitage at Nakpu (Upper Forest) and began to instruct a new batch of students. But what he had initially assumed would be a long-term retreat was interrupted by calls to return to restive central Tibet: first, the leaders of Tsel and the increasing number of visitors from Kham came into conflict in Lhasa; and then the Sakya leadership began fighting among themselves.

Later, after he had helped negotiate a settlement to the first of these disputes, Rangjung Dorjé wrote a song recording the devastation that the second outbreak of fighting wrought on a population already overburdened by the continuing presence of Mongol troops. In this graphic song, he describes starving people who are angry at their rulers.

He sought refuge from the troubles at Karma, in far-off Kham. During this visit—in contrast to his last visit and as a reflection of his improved social status—he stayed in the monastery's central buildings for years. While there, he composed another series of influential commentaries, and in response to pleas from desperate locals in a nearby area, he performed a deed unusual for a yogi of his time: he oversaw the building of a bridge. The locals, he recorded, were pleased when the bridge was finished, but one of his otherworldly guides, Avalokiteśvara, was less impressed, warning him in a vision that activities like this would raise his profile dangerously. The only way he could truly help beings in "dark times," Avalokiteśvara explained, was by developing his abilities in retreat. After receiving these instructions, Rangjung Dorjé returned to Kongpo, where he stayed for another three years, but his vision had been prescient, for he was now too famous to hide.

Around this time, the Mongol court had decided the fractious Sakya were not exercising their authority effectively in Tibet, and when they began casting around for another charismatic religious leader through whom they could influence the Plateau's inhabitants, Rangjung Dorjé seemed a natural choice. After receiving a summons from the court, he was able to rebuff their overtures for three years, but eventually, in early 1332, he set off for the Mongols' capitals, Dadu and Xanadu. It proved to be a tumultuous time at court, too. From the time Rangjung Dorjé left Tibet until his return two years later, he traveled at the behest of no less than three emperors. The precarious existence of those who inhabited the throne during these latter years of the Mongol Empire was also reflected in the oft-cited reason for the court's decision to allow Rangjung Dorjé's eventual return to Tibet: the procurement of "long-life water" (*tshe chu*).

Rangjung Dorjé was allowed to travel to Tibet, but the imperial envoy that accompanied him restricted his movements. He could not return to Kongpo and instead entered retreat at Chimpu Hermitage near Samyé Monastery, to acquire Padmasambhava's life-prolonging water. After reportedly receiving it, he managed to oversee the creation of a seminal version of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, before he had to return to the capitals. This was the last of Rangjung Dorjé's long journeys, and it was not one he performed willingly. As soon as he returned to court, he began begging the emperor, ostensibly his religious pupil, to let him leave. The emperor refused, and Rangjung Dorjé lived the rest of his life in exile.

RETREATING TO TSARI

His decision to enforce Rangjung Dorjé's exile in his capitals displayed a fundamental disjuncture between the emperor's and Rangjung Dorjé's visions of the world. In the emperor's vision, which was shared by many, these capitals were the centers of the world. Rangjung Dorjé, by contrast, was working from a very different map. His map provided several alternate "capitals" toward which he felt a much stronger pull. The first of these was Bodhgayā, the *vajra* seat at the center of India's sacred geography, which, unlike his guru Orgyenpa, Rangjung Dorjé was never able to visit. He also carried with him a mind-map of Tibet's sacred sites, which included at one other capital, Tsari, the site of Cakrasamvara's mind-*maṇḍala*.

The evidence for the centrality of this sacred site to Rangjung Dorjé's perception of place is not only clear in the way that he writes about it but also in the effort he put into establishing a foothold near this sacred locality—a foothold that would support his own standing, the standing of the Karmapa body rosary, and the Karma Kagyü lineage more generally. His previous, first attempt at establishing a center at Tsari had not been successful.[3] This time, after dedicating himself to ten years of teaching and writing in central Tibet, he returned to Tsari with more resources and a more established reputation. But he bypassed Old Tsari. The region's prime sacred real estate was—for an isolated spiritual site—already well populated, and any incursions into it would have been fiercely contested. Instead, he moved to New Tsari; it was in less demand but still part of the Tsari *maṇḍala*.[4]

New Tsari was connected to Old Tsari by the Jala (Rainbow) Pass, from which pilgrims descended past the frozen Tsokar (White) Lake into the Nélungchu (Sacred Sites) River Valley. Further downstream, at a place called Pangram Gang (Bistort Meadow) Ridge,[5] a large tributary entered the Nélungchu River from the left. Rangjung Dorjé held teachings and *gaṇacakra*s in this meadow, which suggests the site he chose to found his hermitage, Nakpu (Upper Forest), was at the top of this tributary's river valley.[6]

The cultural strategies Rangjung Dorjé used to reimagine this site were the same as those he had used elsewhere: he described the visions he experienced, sang praises to it, and "tamed the locals" by granting them refuge and bodhicitta vows.[7] He also insisted that past luminaries had visited the region, sanctifying it with their presence. This time, his claims were focused on Padmasambhava, who Rangjung Dorjé insisted had performed yogas in the Kongtrang Valley, a valley that ran into the Nélungchu Valley. Rangjung Dorjé then added to the history of the place by using the "exponential increase in wisdom" he experienced there to "compose an autocommentary to the *Profound Inner Meaning*."[8]

The only detail of his cultural landscaping at Nakpu that diverged from his earlier literary and ritual projects was the effort he put into the hermitage's physical appearance. For, according to later records, he engaged many locals in constructing its buildings and even insisted that a special type of flowering perennial (perhaps the bistort) be planted around them.[9]

The other recurring theme of Rangjung Dorjé's transformation of Nakpu was his increasing interactions with the area's female protectors, the earth-guardian *ḍākinī*s who controlled many of the region's environmental features. Like the environment, these *ḍākinī*s could also be capricious, and, therefore, the rapport Rangjung Dorjé reported developing with them came to represent his ability to control natural forces.

The first of Rangjung Dorjé's interactions with the *ḍākinī*s occurred in the same year he founded Nakpu Hermitage as he traveled to Old Tsari via the Yarlung Tsangpo River, in all likelihood because inclement weather had blocked the Jala Pass. As he traveled, this route too became perilous when a landslide made the riverside path impassable. Wondering what to do next, he and his companions stared down at the river only to see, "the *ḍākinī*s, those faithful nonhumans make a road [for him and his party] out of the [Yarlung] Tsangpo River's sands." This event enabled Rangjung Dorjé and his entourage to cross the river, as his "worldly [students] wondered at the event." But a few days later, the sand bridge "disappeared, and the land returned to what it was before."[10]

His second widely reported encounter with the region's *ḍākinī*s was more ominous than the first. In this episode, a teacher named Tsama Paṇchen and his entourage came to meet Rangjung Dorjé at Pangram Gang, where they asked to be introduced to the *ḍākinī*s. Tsuklak Trengwa, relying on Tsama Paṇchen's report of the event, set the scene for the encounter:

> It was the dead of winter, the sacred site [of New Tsari] was blanketed in snow, and as they [Rangjung Dorjé and Tsama Paṇchen's party] were on horseback [they could not travel up the Nélungchu River Valley]. [As a second choice, they] asked Rangjung Dorjé to invite the *ḍākinī*s to come out to meet them. [He accepted. After a while] his gaze became like the wind, and his blue[-black] horse started traveling toward the east [with the others following]. Presently a mist with rainbow colors unfolded itself [around them], and in [the rainbow] they all saw eighteen women singing. They stopped their horses and [the *ḍākinī*s] granted them a hand empowerment, before telling them to leave. The *ḍākinī*s then departed. [The Karmapa] warned them not to let their minds drift in [the *ḍākinī*s' presence] as he had earlier lost people to them. Even today, he said, they had taken his bodyguard's horse, and he was certain they would return [for more horses and people].[11]

At the same time as Rangjung Dorjé and others' liberation stories worked to sacralize the region by telling stories like this, his songs, by contrast, continued to provide a deconstructive counterpoint. The song he sang for the very same group at Pangram Gang, for example, sought to dispel rather than create myths about the site. Indeed, it deconstructed the whole notion of a sacred site: first by mapping its components onto the subtle body and then warning against any investment in external sites. The song reads in part:

> When we speak of all the buddhas' pure lands,
> [And] the twenty-four sacred sites, it is not
> As if they truly exist out there;
> Our own bodies have the channels and chakra.
> Or, to be specific, at the great sacred sites,
> [Within our body] those called *ḍāka*s and *ḍākinī*s
> Abide in the elements and *bindu*.
>
> When we speak of the *bindu*,
> We speak of the indivisible hardness,[12] which
> [Manifests] as hair and fingernails as it descends.
> And, likewise, when we speak of the
> Twenty-four elements that manifest at these sites,
> We speak specifically of the three channels, the hidden channels:
> The left, right, and central bodily channels.
>
> Get the vital point that the myriad interdependencies
> Are the indivisible subject and object, method and wisdom.
> See *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*'s nonduality, their nonself;
> [See] what the Buddha called "the great sacred site."
>
> Arouse bliss, clarity, and nonconceptual wisdom,
> Because the sacred sites of the five hidden channels
> Are where the five *ḍākinī*s live,
> And their entity is pure subtle energy . . .
>
> [To have] the concept of external sacred sites
> Is to generate an obsession with place;
> This end-of-time *vajra* yogi destroys
> Complicated, external sacred sites.[13]

The last verse is perhaps the most intriguing. For in it, even after all his efforts to establish sacred sites across the Tibetan Plateau, after all the obstacles he overcame

to live at Tsari, and perhaps most importantly, after making many explicit links between the sacredness of these sites and that of the Karmapa reincarnation lineage, he still declares himself a destroyer of sacred sites, an iconoclast.

TROUBLE IN LHASA, A BRIDGE IN KHAM

Despite the isolation of Rangjung Dorjé's hermitage and his commitment to retreat, worldly events again interrupted his yoga practice shortly after he sang this song, and he was recalled to Lhasa in 1326 to perform another of his roles: peacemaker. Neither he nor later redactors of his tale provide any details about the disputes he resolved there. But after aligning their accounts with other Tibetan histories, the circumstance appears to be that he was summoned to Lhasa by the Tsel myriarch, Künga Dorjé—the author of the *Red Annals*—to resolve a fierce dispute between the inhabitants of Tsel and pilgrims from Kham.[14] Having helped to resolve this dispute, Rangjung Dorjé prepared to return to Kongpo, but he did not leave in time. While he was in central Tibet, another more consequential dispute arose between the houses of Sakya.

The fighting at Sakya started after the death of Zangpo Pel (1262–1324), its abbot and influential ruler. Zangpo Pel had been the last male heir of the Sakya Khön family and, therefore, under intense pressure to produce male heirs. He more than fulfilled his procreational duties by siring eleven sons. Sakya then had a new problem; they had to decide which of these heirs would claim their lay and religious thrones. Zangpo Pel's one son without a vested interest in the dispute, the imperial preceptor, Künga Lodrö Gyeltsen (1299–1327), tried to resolve the impasse by dividing the monastery into four houses and appointing four of Zangpo Pel's sons to run them. There was still an abbot at Sakya, one Namkha Lekpé Gyeltsen (1305–1343), who was also head of one of the houses, the Zhitok Labrang, but according to the historian Luciano Petech his position was a "primacy of honor only."[15]

With the abbot's rule undermined in this way, much more power was then invested in Sakya's lay authority, the great lord Özer Sengge (d. 1329), who was not attached to Zhitok Labrang. This caused the members of Zhitok Labrang to rise against the great lord, and in 1327, rumors began to spread that Mongol troops would invade to restore order. Along with many others, including the myriarch of Zhalu Monastery, Rangjung Dorjé fled to Kham.[16]

When he arrived at Karma Monastery, Rangjung Dorjé had ensured his own safety, but he was also greatly affected by the devastation he had seen on his journey there. He expressed this desolation in one of his most highly effective songs. This song is divided into three parts. The first two parts are modeled on his other socially critical songs, but their content and intent are much stronger. Part 1 savages the monks of the Zhitok Labrang faction who rose up against the great lord. It reads:

Those monks don't behave right.
Debauchery sustains them, and the
The three dharma robes don't sit well on them.
They are just yellow shapes, wearing brocade, carrying the sticks
[They use] to chase away dogs, sons, nephews, and neighbors.
And still, like dogs, they crave food.

To get what they want, they do things that aren't right;
The little wealth they have, they use in unjust ways.
They encourage others to do evil;
To punish humble *dhārmika*s,
They reward lies and other bad behavior.
They pretend to be great ones, but do not behave like them.

[Just as] it is unseemly for shepherds to kill antelope;
It is also unseemly for these people to drink beer,
Ruin their memory, keep women, and have improper sex.[17]

Following Orgyenpa's lead in expressing equal chagrin toward all political factions, in part 2 Rangjung Dorjé then proceeds to attack the great lord's faction, and even his backer the Mongol emperor. It reads:

The king [the emperor] does not follow the dharma,
He is controlled by those who lust and hate.
His lord may be "great," but
He is a "great" bandit, a "great" crook.
He brings punishment on truthful people
And fills the land with thieves.
His [followers] destroy temples and *stūpas*,
Crush and consume their images,
And disrespect dharma texts.[18]

Part 3 is even more devastating than these condemnations. In it, Rangjung Dorjé describes the effects of constant fighting and deprivations on the region's ordinary people—a description that, despite its evocative comparisons to other less-verifiable regions of the Buddhist cosmological map, also appears to describe several atrocities of which he had personal knowledge. This section of the song reads:

Because of this, the gods and spirits
Are shaken, and disease fills the land;

Rain does not fall; there are poor harvests,
And what little that does grow is
Carried away by frosts and hail.
Many are robbed and beaten
By famine's destitution, so they
Cry out, dying on the road.
A few people eat the flesh of others;
A few sell their children for food.
Others, racked with hunger, jump in the river.

Wailing, wailing they don't know night and day;
Their skeletons are barely covered with the skin
That hangs off them: off bones and off heads.
Their [corpses] burn up like vegetation.
[Seeing] them is like seeing hungry ghosts directly.
Everywhere there is killing, shackling, and beating;
Pus and blood trickle from all the leprous boils and lesions.
[Seeing] this is like seeing the hell realms directly.
For these people, the road to the four pure continents is blocked;
They could easily be taken for animals. They are in human bodies
But they experience the sufferings of the lower realms.

Kye ma! Evil times are upon us!
Kye hu! Poor beings!
Don't the bodhisattvas think of them? These destitute
People in these lands of Amdo, Kham, and Tö?
I fear the whole Land of Snows has
Become as unjust as [its rulers].[19]

The Mongol armies that threatened to invade did not do so at that time, and for a moment the internal frictions at Sakya subsided. Still, Rangjung Dorjé did not return to central Tibet for several years, sitting out the rest of Özer Senggé's reign in Karma Monastery. With his position at the monastery solidified, he began to write again, further preserving his position for posterity.

At the beginning of his stay at Karma, Rangjung Dorjé used his time to write two commentaries on Nāgārjuna's *In Praise of Dharmadhātu* and Saraha's *Song-Treasury of Dohā*. According to Tsuklak Trengwa, his writing of these two commentaries was accompanied by an increase in his teaching on "a combination of calm abiding and special insight."[20] Given that it does not mention any

tantric empowerments, Tsuklak Trengwa's description of this teaching technique suggests Rangjung Dorjé was advocating Gampopa's controversial sūtra *mahāmudrā*. In the past, this had raised contention among some parts of the Tibetan Buddhist community (especially Sakya commentators) because these instructions were provided without prerequisite tantric empowerments. The fact that Rangjung Dorjé's increase in the employment of this sūtra-based method was accompanied by his renewed interest in the two previously mentioned texts is telling. *In Praise of Dharmadhātu* is often described as a bridge between the sūtra and *mahāmudrā* presentations of mind's nature. And Saraha's *Song-Treasury* repeatedly downplays the formal aspects of yoga practice in its presentation of *mahāmudrā*.

The situation in the countryside did not completely escape Rangjung Dorjé's attention after he arrived at Karma, however, and along with his religious pursuits he became a—literal—bridge builder. As he describes this episode in his *Verse Liberation Story*:

> When the first month of the dragon year [1328] arrived, I began having many clear, visionary dreams in which dharma protectors [told me] through signs to build a bridge across the Sok River in the midst of the lay Buddhist Dorjé Gyelpo's [Vajra King's] lands. I did as they asked, and while we worked on the bridge, neither the *nāga* king nor his entourage interrupted our work. It meant we were able to achieve our goal.[21]

The Sok River was (and is) one of the earliest tributaries of the Salween River, which rises near it. According to accounts from this period and later, it was an especially dangerous river that sat on an important trade route.[22] The decision to build a bridge over it was a departure from Rangjung Dorjé's normal religious activities, but it was an extension of his role as a go-between for humans and the unseen world.[23]

This foray of his into more practical undertakings did not last long, however. As Rangjung Dorjé worked on the bridge, he also experienced a vision of Avalokiteśvara, who discouraged him from pursuing further projects, informing him that, "If [he] became distracted by such projects in a dark time, obstacles would arise; hordes would invade solitary sites, the dharma would not proliferate, and many people would become jealous."[24] Avalokiteśvara further advised him to return to Nakpu Hermitage, which he did shortly thereafter. Coincidently, this was around the same time that Özer Senggé died, and the tensions in central and southern Tibet were alleviated.

THE WOMEN PROBLEM

After passing through central Tibet without returning to Tsurpu, Rangjung Dorjé arrived back at Nakpu Hermitage in early 1329. He spent the next three years in Kongpo, mostly in retreat: this would be his last period of retreat in the forests of southern Tibet.

Shortly after he returned there, he reported receiving otherworldly messages that his presence would shortly be required at the emperor's court. In a vision of Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, who was closely associated with China, he was told he would be required at the Mongols' winter capital, Dadu, in northern China in three years' time.[25]

Despite the presence of this overarching threat, the rest of Rangjung Dorjé's writing from this period is surprisingly focused on hermitage life. Following the characteristics of their respective genres, his songs once again reflect his day-to-day experiences with his students, and the *Verse Liberation Story* describes his visions and "dharma activities." These deeds included the establishment of another hermitage in the same area, Lhundrub Teng (Spontaneous Heights), just before he left for China and Mongolia.[26] When combined, they paint a portrait of Rangjung Dorjé as a senior guru; he instructs students in his outward life and engages in highly esoteric practices in his inner life.

Rangjung Dorjé's experiences instructing his students are described in detail in the songs he composed during this period. Sometimes they describe circumstantial difficulties that require a song of encouragement from him, like the following verses:

> Mountain hermits, yogis like me,
> Do not have a scrap of food or clothing;
> We aspire to find comfort from
> Inner heat and the essence we extract [from plants].
>
> Whatever suffering we experience now,
> We accept that it comes from previous times;
> We [see] even the slightest bad condition
> As the clearing of past bad karma.[27]

But along with the continuation of this and other themes from past songs, there was also a distinct shift in emphasis in his songs from this period. While his earlier songs concentrated on his own difficulties, these songs focused more on the hardships his students encountered. And while his earlier critiques were directed

to his society's religious elites, the critiques he composed in Kongpo were directed at his students. At first, Rangjung Dorjé reports a discomfort at this shift:

> I praise myself and slander others;
> Seeing others' faults should remind me of my own.
> When I do not know [those I criticize] this is still very true,
> But when I do know them, I should be ashamed![28]

Despite this initial hesitation, over the next year, Rangjung Dorjé grew more comfortable as a critic, serving up the following only months after his expression of hesitation:

> Right now, apparently, impure students
> All need fine robes to awaken.
> The *siddha*s of the past, our superiors,
> Had no clothes at all and still
> Attained the siddhi of *mahāmudrā,* but
> Right now, apparently, as these [dark] times descend,
> When there are no fine robes, there is no pure dharma!
>
> If an awakened one in rags arrived, you would
> Turn them away, chuck them out of the camp;
> You only respect and serve those with fine robes.
> If some well-dressed person with no dharma arrived,
> You would show them respect, saying, "Here, have a seat!"
> You behave like evil people![29]

A recurrent theme in Rangjung Dorjé's admonishing songs is the difficulty of illuminating students' minds in "dark times." The theme of encroaching darkness in these songs is particularly noteworthy because previously he had suggested Tsari and other sacred sites would remain beacons of light during dark times. His description suggests that his idea of these places as a haven is restricted to the influence they have on very advanced tantric practitioners—like himself—rather than those under his instruction. Of one group of students, for example, he had the following to say:

> I might have developed impartial compassion, but [even]
> The Buddha's compassion could not protect this lot!
> Their ignorant minds are so densely murky![30]

But even these compassion-killing murky minds were not the recipients of the harshest criticism in this group of Rangjung Dorjé's songs: that was reserved for Tsari's laywomen. The especially pointed critique he delivered to them reads in part:

> The laywomen [here] are especially [bad].
> I've seen them chase after preconceived desires and
> Ignite when they see those who may satiate them.
>
> They run after charlatans and don't remember
> Any bit of the dharma I taught them.
> They're not courageous in *dhyāna* cultivation, but
> They put a lot of effort into debauchery!
>
> If you get friendly with a dog, they lick your face.
> If you get friendly with children, they hang off your shoulders.
>
> Please bodhisattvas, do not abandon
> The beings of these dark times;
> I have compassion for them but in the
> Darkness, disciplining them is difficult.
>
> May they cultivate equanimity at least once in this life
> And aspire to more discipline in the next.[31]

This song is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it is the only instance in Rangjung Dorjé's songs of a critique directed at a subaltern rather than an elite group; he has condemned a vulnerable group for their attempts to find happiness and protection. This song is also the only time his critique focused on his subjects' "nature" as opposed to their behavior: if dogs will lick, he suggests, and children will hang off your shoulder, women will be floozies. He even acknowledges this failure in the verse following his condemnation, admitting that he has given up on the women, lost sight of their buddha nature "in the darkness."

Given this context, the prescription he gives them is also noteworthy. For whereas in earlier lines he tells every other person he criticizes to improve their behavior immediately, in these lines he merely expresses his own wish that these women will "cultivate equanimity at least once in this life and aspire to more discipline in the next." The only caveat to his condemnation of them for their femaleness is his suggestion that it is not womanhood itself that creates this difficulty but rather womanhood in "these dark times." This distinction also seems to underpin his advice, which is not that they seek rebirth as a male specifically but instead that they aspire to any life with "more discipline."

Moreover, placing the song in the context of other descriptions of human women in his writing further emphasizes its ambiguity. As with many men within the broader Buddhist tradition, he was positive about mothers (if not their wombs), using motherly love as a model for bodhicitta.[32] He was also very respectful to otherworldly women, like *ḍākinī*s. But real, human women are most notable in Rangjung Dorjé's life and writing for their absence.

The absence of women that is evident in Rangjung Dorjé's story also became something of a trope within the narratives, traditions, and institutions of reincarnation in Tibet more broadly. The model of reincarnation is one in which, with few exceptions, boys are taken away from their mothers at a young age and brought into an all-male lineage and institution. And as the reincarnation institution became the main infrastructure of power networks in the Tibetan cultural sphere, its proliferation did much to erase women's social and political roles even further than the case had been before. What those involved in this emerging institution needed to figure out was how to maintain their commitment to compassion for all sentient beings, including women, in a space that excluded women. The answer seems to be that women could be dealt with compassionately and respectfully if they were idealized, transformed into abstract concepts of compassionate motherhood or fleshless goddesses.[33]

The idealization is highlighted in the following extract, which also provides an insight into Rangjung Dorjé's practice of celibacy. It begins by describing the images and afflicted emotions that assail him and other monks:

> However much we strive [to defeat it],
> Demonic ignorance [remains] overwhelming, and
> Illusory, lovely seductresses remain powerful;
> Lustful women, intoxicating women, pretty women
> Move quickly, following us constantly . . .

Later, the poem changes track, describing Rangjung Dorjé's defeat of these mental images and the way he works to transform his perception of women.

> I, myself, am the lone yogi who emerged victorious
> From the battle with preconceived demons.
> The compassionate moon shines behind me;[34]
> The light of the gnostic sun swirls in front of me.
> Pretty women dissolve into my *dhyāna*'s nature;
> Māra's[35] daughters melt into *saṃsāra* and *nirvāna*'s [nondual] nature;
> Intoxicating women transform into unconditioned goddesses.[36]

The idealization of women is also notable in the presentation of females in his visions; all the women in these visions are powerful, nonhuman *ḍākinī*s. The earth guardians acted as his surrogate mothers, directing him into his biological mother's womb before he was born, and they reappear as guides throughout his life, particularly during his stays in Kongpo. In his relationships with them and other *ḍākinī*s, Rangjung Dorjé does not encounter any of the same problems he encounters with human women; rather than being his bad students, they are his awakened teachers. This contrast is illustrated vividly by an episode in his *Verse Liberation Story* that occurred around the same time that he said his piece to the women of Tsari. In this episode, he makes one last pilgrimage to Old Tsari before leaving for China and Mongolia, so that he could pay homage to its *ḍākinī*s. Of this farewell, he wrote: "[On the way], in old Tsari, the sacred site of the *ḍākinī*s, I had a vision that a *karma-ḍākinī* granted me her inspiration. The nonhumans [of the region] put on a magical display, the earth shook, and many and various voices [were heard]."[37]

Such a vision is reported in the liberation stories of several monks from this era and could be read as a celibate version of the blessings bestowed in the *karma-mudrā* or sexual yoga of noncelibate yogis.[38] Unlike some of the descriptions of *karma-mudrā* practice, however, and the more negative and passive descriptions of the real women who perform the role of consort in them, in this image it was the *ḍākinī* that was in the position of authority. It was she who granted him a blessing that he accepted happily and reported with pride.[39] The difference between this and his portrayal of the region's human women could not be starker.

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EMPIRE

Following this unusually female-centric episode in Rangjung Dorjé's life, the next series of events brought male authority figures very much back into the foreground in the form of two otherworldly bodhisattvas and one this-worldly emperor.

The first figure he encountered was Mañjuśrī, who in several visions reiterated his call for Rangjung Dorjé to travel to the Mongol capitals[40] and in doing so repeated the narrative trope of otherworldly invitations that had marked the start of all Rangjung Dorjé's other journeys. But this vision also differed from other, similar visions in a number of ways: first, because Mañjuśrī was not an ordinary, local spirit and his protectorate, China, was not an ordinary Tibetan region; and second, because for the first time in his story Rangjung Dorjé received a series of contradictory visions around the same time. These visions were of another highly regarded bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara, who wanted Rangjung Dorjé to stay in his protectorate: the solitudes of Tibet. The first in the series of visions of

Avalokiteśvara that Rangjung Dorjé experienced was on his final pilgrimage to old Tsari, just before he encountered the *karma-ḍākinī*. He recalled it later in this way:

> I dreamt a dream that arose from illusory imprints, in which I heard Avalokiteśvara, the master of compassion, saying this to three princes:
>
> Entrust yourself to solitude, and the
> Quality of your *samādhi* will increase.
> As the moon *maṇḍala* travels through the sky,
> It is [sometimes] obscured and [sometimes] shines clearly.
>
> As the constellations shine in the sky,
> They too are [sometimes] obscured and [sometimes] clear;
> [Sometimes] it is the sun and moon that [obscure] them.
> Examine carefully what helps you and others!
>
> And then, after showing this sign, they disappeared.[41]

The third male authority figure that profoundly influenced Rangjung Dorjé during this period was the Mongol emperor Tuq Temür (1304–1332; r. 1328–April 1329 and September 1329–1332). The emperor's direct influence on Rangjung Dorjé's life began in the spring of 1331 when he sent an edict that summoned the yogi to court. This document has been reprinted several times in a variety of contexts.[42] It reads:

> By the blessings of the three jewels, [and] in dependence on the glory of great merit, I, the emperor, make this request of Rangjung Dorjé. The teachings of the Buddha have spread as far as the northern kings, and the power of their prophetic words has caused a variety of suitable Buddhist dharma systems to exist [here]. As a consequence of this, even Qubilai Khan respected and relied upon very many spiritual friends. In this place, the popularity of the Buddha's teachings is clear to all.
>
> I also wish to perform excellently [my duty as] an insignificant protector of the teachings. [In this regard], I have heard much about you. It has been said that you have great learning, and you possess exceptional [personal] qualities. [This is why] I am sending you guards and commands [to travel to court].
>
> If you offer excuses not to come, then this will cause the faithful [to develop] the fault of disenchantment. The bad-smelling [mental] seeds that would predispose you not to abandon the yogis of your land are faulty; [they] destroy your altruistic desire to help all indiscriminately. This is a misdeed that is not [in accord with] the intention of the teachings. It is indifference to the

suffering and difficulty of all beings. It is not my intention to cause any harm to the teachings generally, and I will not change [this approach]. Therefore, I ask you as a leader, with the intention of helping all beings, to come quickly. If you do come, you will be able to perform teachings as you wish.

This was written on the thirteenth day of the third spring month in the year of the sheep [1331].[43]

Part of the reason the summons has been preserved and reprinted so often is that it exemplifies the complex relationship between the Mongol emperors and their Tibetan gurus. On the one hand, for example, the emperor shows Rangjung Dorjé great respect, describing "his great learning" and "exceptional [personal] qualities." But on the other, he positions himself as Buddhism's protector and sees fit to lecture Rangjung Dorjé not just on his responsibilities to his secular king but also on the practice of Buddhism. This mix of worldly and transcendent authority is very different from the operations of power presented in Rangjung Dorjé's writing. It is, after all, the emperor whom he had previously said did "not follow the dharma" and was "controlled by those who lust and hate."[44]

This last comment is particularly telling because it suggests that despite his expressed wish to stay out of politics, Rangjung Dorjé knew something about the goings-on at the Mongol court. Tuq Temür was indeed very much under the influence of the two powerful ministers who had installed him as emperor (twice)—El Temür (d. 1333) and Bayan (ca. 1281–1340)—and unlikely to act without their acquiescence. Moreover, although there is no particular record of these two ministers' "lust," there are detailed records of their often-brutal suppression of enemies, including Tuq Temür's brother Qutughtu (1300–1329; r. 1329), who had been briefly enthroned with the help of the Chagatai Khanate in 1329 before being murdered on El Temür and Bayan's order.[45]

Surprisingly, given his previous strident critique of the court and the example set by his mentor Orgyenpa, Rangjung Dorjé did not reject the Mongol summons. In his liberation story, he attributes this acceptance to his visions of Mañjuśrī. But, given the dire threats that hung over his compatriots, there was also much social pressure on him to make this journey. What there is no evidence for, however, is a change in the otherworldly paradigms of power and authority upon which Rangjung Dorjé had relied his entire life. Throughout the rest of his writing, he rarely missed an opportunity to question directly or indirectly the imperial court's authority or the authority of their Sakya regents.

The first method Rangjung Dorjé used to do this—one that was so successful he repeated it several times—was stalling. The edict commanding his presence at court arrived in spring 1331, but Rangjung Dorjé insisted he must first fulfill his

commitment to undertake the rains retreat at another hermitage he had founded, Lhundrub Teng. It was autumn when he finally traveled to Lhasa and met the newly appointed imperial preceptor, Künga Gyeltsen (1310–1365), with whom he was supposed to travel to the capitals. Together they proceeded to Dam in North Tibet, taking the "China Road." But again, Rangjung Dorjé stalled, this time insisting that a violent storm was "a magic show put on for him by Nyenchen Tanglha and other local deities" as a sign that he should not travel.[46] This sign allowed him to return to Tsurpu for the winter with his Mongol escort. The storm was not evidently bad enough to stop Künga Gyeltsen's journey, and he continued to the capitals.

Rangjung Dorjé did not set out again for the capitals until the first day of the second month of the new Tibetan year, at the beginning of another spring. Even then, he made slow progress. "On the road, I [stopped] to help wanderers," he recalled later, "and turned the wheel of the Mahāyāna dharma when beings wanted me to do this."[47]

As he slowly made his way toward the capital, he continued to resist the Mongol/Sakya authority in a variety of ways. During one of his teaching stops, for example, at Radreng Monastery near Dam, he performed a song whose colophon states that it was sung for his Kadam hosts. It reads:

> Mind's nature alone is the seed of everything;
> When impure it is speculation, the base of *saṃsāra*, [but]
> [As] its actual base is completely pure by nature,
> When its self-liberating thatness is realized, it is *nirvāṇa*.
>
> Generate great compassion for unrealized wanderers,
> And admiration for the guru. Make an effort to depend on
> The one who teaches the sacred dharma, the nobles' paths.
> This knowledge is the baseline, the entrance to the path.
>
> Then, from this foundation, in order to complete
> The six perfections, enter the path of calm abiding and special insight;
> Grasp well the vital point of ardent ingenuity.
> This, in the main, is how to travel on the nobles' paths.
>
> [Together] wisdom without preconceived definitions
> And *dhyāna* focused on thatness will unmistakably
> See logic's [actual] subject, the *dharmatā*! So, engage
> With this cause of liberation from existence and peace.
>
> Then, when the [two] collections of adventitious veils
> That [block] the natural essence of the stainless Buddha are

Cleared away, the bodily and gnostic deeds, the awakened activity,
Will manifest the power to engage with *saṃsāra* as it actually is.

This is the "path and result" [*lam 'bras*], the foundation of the
Buddha's speech; it is an uncommon instruction,
A vital point. May it help all wanderers.[48]

At first glance, this song seems like many of the other teaching songs he performed during later life. In one way or another, most of these gave an overview of the path to buddhahood, following the basic "graduated path" outline of Gampopa's famous work, *An Ornament for Precious Liberation*, and this song was no exception.[49] Gampopa's approach is slightly different than the Kadam approach in that it depends on the guru's pointing-out instructions, but Rangjung Dorjé acknowledges this with what may be a joke about the Kadam preference for *pramāṇa*, or logic: "logic's [actual] subject [is] the *dharmatā*!"

But the real punch line to the song comes in the last verse, and it is at the Sakyas' expense. The first clue to this intent is in his use of the term "path and result" (*lam 'bras*), the name of the Sakyapa's most revered tantric teaching, but here Rangjung Dorjé uses it to describe his own sūtra *mahāmudrā* teaching: this is a direct jibe at Sakya Paṇḍita's critique of sūtra *mahāmudrā* for blending the teachings of sūtra and tantra. To intensify this gibe, Rangjung Dorjé then goes on to call this sūtra teaching an "uncommon instruction" (*thun mong ma yin pa*), a term usually used to describe tantric teachings. He was mocking the Sakya, and taking his time traveling to the Mongol capitals.

Six months after his sojourn at Radreng, Rangjung Dorjé arrived at the border between Tibet and China. At that point, he reports experiencing a vision of the emperor in ill health that—too late, it turned out—caused him to increase his tempo drastically. [50] On hearing the news, Rangjung Dorjé performed ceremonies for him and wondered whether to continue to the court.[51] Then he received another visionary dream, in which he "heard dharma protectors proclaiming: "You will help your students from before, and you will help beings. There will be no obstacles; all your resolutions will be fulfilled." After this, his *Verse Liberation* Story continues, "he traveled quickly to the king's palace."[52]

He was too late. Shortly after this vision, on the second of September 1332, Tuq Temür died. After his death, the two ministers who had installed him on the throne, El Temür and Bayan, turned on each other. El Temür made the first move, enthroning the youngest of Qutughtu's sons, Tuq Temür's nephew, the six-year-old Irinjibal (1326–1332). Bayan did not oppose this move outright at first but discreetly began to support Qutughtu's other son, Toghon Temür, who was then aged thirteen.

Rangjung Dorjé and his entourage arrived at the imperial palace in Dadu two months after Tuq Temür's death. After his arrival, he was introduced to Irinjibal during a grand ceremony at the palace, but he made a name for himself by predicting the boy's death. A year later, both the young emperor and his supporter El Temür were dead, and the way was clear for Bayan to install Toghon Temür on the throne. In Rangjung Dorjé's autobiography, he claims a role for himself in the enthronement of the new, young, and final Mongol emperor. "On the eighth day of the sixth month of the bird year [1333]," he wrote, "when I enthroned the Lord of Men, [I could see that] many worldly protectors had also gathered around dancing and gesturing. I took this as a sign that there would be happiness in the empire."

For later Karma Kagyü redactors, the connection between their forefather and a Mongol emperor was too important an opportunity to approach with such spare prose. Characteristically, and in contrast to Rangjung Dorjé, Tsuklak Trengwa paints an elaborate description of the event. It begins with the preenthronement meeting, and reads in part:

> On the full moon in the first month of the bird year [1333], millions of people gathered [in Dadu] at the emperor's invitation. [There were so many people] that it seemed only a great army could have made its way along the road into town. But wherever the precious dharma noble went, a path appeared for him spontaneously. Wearing his black hat and chanting "OṂ MAṆI PADME HŪṂ," he proceeded easily through the crowds.
>
> The emperor was in a big white tent on a golden throne. [When he saw Rangjung Dorjé] from a distance, he [left the tent] and came to escort him, placing his head at [Rangjung Dorjé's] feet. Then the patron and recipient entered the palace together. The imperial family, El Temür, the imperial preceptor, and all the emperor's ministers were there, and they all showed faith in [Rangjung Dorjé], bowing to him and uniting with the dharma.[53]

Tsuklak Trengwa's description of the enthronement is intriguing for several reasons. First, it is interesting to note his highlander's view of the crowded city teeming with "millions of people."[54] But more to the point, it is noteworthy how much Tsuklak Trengwa relished the idea of the emperor coming out of his tent and placing his head at Rangjung Dorjé's feet on the road.[55] It is a description that shows a fundamental unfamiliarity with the role that the emperor played in his capital; for it was highly unlikely that the "lord of men" would walk out onto teeming streets, and it was even more highly unlikely that he would have placed his head at anyone's feet, at least in public. This is not to say that Tsuklak Trengwa made no efforts at historical accuracy; he does allude to El Temür's and Bayan's influence by placing

El Temür in the enthronement scene. But his casual alignment of the wrong—and dead—minister with the wrong boy-king further suggests that his main compositional purpose was very much to impress upon his audience the Karmapa's importance, not to create an accurate record of a historical event.[56]

There is even some speculation that Rangjung Dorjé became the de facto imperial preceptor, after being appointed the lesser title of national preceptor in 1334, shortly after Toghon Temür's enthronement, an appointment that was noted in the *Yuan Histories* and elsewhere. But he does not make either of these claims for himself. [57]

A LEAVE OF ABSENCE

After having taken his time getting to the capitals, shortly after he arrived, Rangjung Dorjé began making attempts to leave. At first, these attempts were thwarted by the upheavals that accompanied the enthronement of two emperors within a year, so Rangjung Dorjé followed the imperial court as it wintered in Dadu and summered in Xanadu. But six months after Toghon Temür's enthronement he made his first request to the emperor to return to Tibet. The young emperor (or more precisely, his ministers) procrastinated. Then Rangjung Dorjé had a visionary dream, in which he saw "A hermitage in a fearsome mountainside forest, in which *ḍākinī*s made offerings to a white man who radiated light. As I watched and listened, the radiant man said, "Do not stay here, flee to snowy lands. This will help you and others."[58]

All later redactors claim that this radiant, white man was Avalokiteśvara,[59] performing the same role he had played several times before: instructing Rangjung Dorjé to return to Tibet and, more specifically, to the mountainside forests of Kongpo. Whoever it was, the vision made Rangjung Dorjé doubly determined to return to the mountains, but something had to make his trip there worthwhile for the emperor too. Rangjung Dorjé does not give any reason for the court's change of mind that allowed him to leave the palace "on the fifteenth day of the fifth month of the dog year [1334]," despite what he acknowledges as their doubts about his leaving.[60] But later storytellers provide more details. According to them, Rangjung Dorjé was only allowed to leave on the promise that he would retrieve long-life water for the emperor's use.[61]

Perhaps aware that he had to return to the capitals as soon as he procured the water, Rangjung Dorjé took his time doing it. First, he extended his journey home as much as possible. Traveling via Mount Wutaishan, a sacred site dedicated to Mañjuśrī,[62] he then spent several months at what remained of the Tangut court, which an earlier Mongol invasion had all but wiped out.[63] There,

according to his recollections, he gave teachings and experienced several powerful visions;[64] according to later storytellers, he also received a large amount of gold from a strangely shirtless local.[65] His circuitous route home then took him through northern Kham,[66] where he negotiated the end to several disputes, and onto Karma, where he stopped briefly. During the last leg of his journey from Karma to Central Tibet, he stopped at Dam, where he participated in a three-day religious ceremony and experienced a vision of Nyenchen Tanglha, Jomo Gangkar, and their retinues "appearing like mists" to welcome him home. At the same time, he heard "a voice from the east saying, 'Your students here need help,'" and took this to mean he would return to the Mongol court.[67]

Rangjung Dorjé's journey to Tibet ended at Tsurpu. But even at this late stage of his life, after he had been feted by emperors and received much gold, he chose not to stay in the Karmapas' main seat for long. The only marked difference in his reception at this monastery in which he had grown up was his inclusion in the process of appointing the monastery's next abbot; diplomatically, he chose another of Karma Pakshi's relatives.[68]

Despite what had evidently been a strange-if-not-strained relationship between Rangjung Dorjé and the Tsurpu hierarchy, he still left a good deal of the wealth he had accumulated during his travels there, dedicating it to building and statue projects. This gift demonstrated his continued investment in Tsurpu as the seat of the Karmapa body rosary, even if he chose not to stay there personally.[69]

Instead of staying at Tsurpu, Rangjung Dorjé finally journeyed to the place from which he hoped to extract the emperor's long-life water: Chimpu Hermitage, in the hills behind Samyé Monastery. Rangjung Dorjé described his stay at this sacred site in this way:

> I sought solitude in the hermitage at Samyé called Chimpu. I stayed there for six months and experienced many visions of the scholar of Oḍḍiyāna—Padmasambhava—and gatherings of *ḍākinī*s. I took this as a sign that this scholar and these women would help me. [As I began this retreat] I saw signs of obstacles. But then came a miraculous display, and [after it] my *samādhi* became exceedingly peaceful.[70]

And in an unusual consonance, a song that he composed during this time describes the same events. It reads in part:

> Padmakara of Oḍḍiyāna [Padmasambhava] showed me the
> Varieties of inconceivable magic that had
> Tamed wanderers in these snowy lands—
> It was Avalokiteśvara's compassion!

[From this I knew] all *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*'s
Phenomena are trickery. They are the play
Of myriad illusions, [and] when realized,
Become just like a moon in the water.

All visions of things, all of them
Are naturally empty and pure,
Unpolluted by intellectual complications, [and]
When purified, like ungraspable space.[71]

The image of an aquatic moon in the third stanza is the closest Rangjung Dorjé came to describing the clandestine purpose of his stay, long-life water. He may have been reticent to describe his endeavors because long-life water was a form of "treasure" that could only be acquired from a visionary state, and therefore, as with most acts of treasure recovery, there were cultural conventions against discussing its retrieval; to have done so, it was thought, would have enraged the *ḍākinī*s who acted as these objects' protectors. Alternately, it may have been another interpolation in his tale.

At least he provided more detail about this episode than he provided about his earlier, alleged retrieval of texts from Lhodrag. Indeed, in this episode he described everything but the water's procurement; he set the scene, introduced the players, and merely fudged the details of the action. This scene setting raises the question of why he did not provide more details of his procurement of the texts from Lhodrag if that event happened, and it casts further doubt on the traditional attribution of these treasure-tradition texts to him.

It is hard to sort out the details of the other project Rangjung Dorjé undertook during his stay too. He describes it briefly in the *Verse Liberation Story*. "I had all the Buddha's sūtras and the commentaries written out," he says, "and when I was consecrating them, countless bodhisattvas appeared to dissolve into them, and I heard a voice proclaiming the dharma."[72] What Rangjung Dorjé is probably referring to here is the beginning of the project to create the Tselpa edition of the Tibetan Buddhist canons: the "translations of the Buddha's words" (*bka' 'gyur*) and "translations of the commentaries" (*bstan 'gyur*). Tselpa Künga Dorje completed this project between 1347 and 1351, after Rangjung Dorjé's death.[73] Rangjung Dorje's claim to be part of it suggests, however, that the process was begun decades before this. The biography of Rangjung Dorje inserted into the *Red Annals* records that he supervised production of "golden translations of the commentaries' canon [*bstan 'gyur*]" at Tsel.[74] It is unclear from these sources, therefore, whether he supervised the production of just the "translations of the commentaries" or both it and the "translations of the Buddha's words" as he

claimed. It is also unclear what the relationship is between the canon he produced and the final Tselpa edition of the canons produced under Tselpa Künga Dorje's direction.

A RETURN TRIP

Rangjung Dorjé completed the canon's production on borrowed time. As he worked on it, the emperor's envoy camped outside Tsel Monastery waiting to take him back to the capitals. His reminiscences from this period express merely a muffled indignation about the gilded cage in which he thereafter found himself, but others, including a few contemporaries, were more explicit about his displeasure. He did not like the capitals, they reported. He did not like the way people behaved in them. He did not like the luxurious but restricted lives of their residents. He did not like the intrigues that permeated the court. He wanted desperately to return to Tibet and most especially to Kongpo.

Rangjung Dorjé's overwhelmingly negative attitude to the capitals is articulated in his stories and songs by using the same techniques as had his cultural landscaping projects in Tibet, but for opposite effect. Instead of ornamenting the capitals with praise, he seeks to dismantle their baroque decorations with his critiques. In the following song, for example, which he composed in Xanadu in the summer of 1337, he portrays this legendary city as a trap from which both he and his audience needed to escape before they were destroyed by it. It reads:

> Now you are free from *saṃsāra*'s mud, strike out for *nirvāṇa*'s dry shore.
> Now you have abandoned worldly relatives, rely on sacred, spiritual friends.
> Now you have stopped pointless chatter, recite secret mantras.
> Now you have stopped exerting yourself in debauchery, exert yourself at *dhyāna*.
> Now you have renounced sweets, rely on *samādhi*'s food.
> Now you have stopped hankering for towns, wander in mountainous borderlands.
>
> Because when we don't do these things—
>
> External appearances become expert in deception;
> Children of the mind, they are crazy in the head.
> Preconceptions proliferate and last longer; but
>
> Virtuous friends become increasingly rare.
> Ignorant veils and fogs get thicker and
> We wander on multiplying cliffs of depravity.

Unwholesome friends lead us
To prison, the three bad destinations,
Where we will wander without end.[75]

This song uses many of the same images that Rangjung Dorjé had previously evoked in the mountains but inverts them. In it, he uses the contrast between society's centers and edges, for example, but speaks from the perspective of a decadent center, in which people are nepotistic, gluttonous, duplicitous, and debauched. In reaction to this, he yearns for the heroic periphery from which spiritual liberation is possible. This inverted perception also changes this song's ending; rather than showing the path to liberation, it shows the path to imprisonment. And while Rangjung Dorjé's song may suggest the ever-present threats of incarceration and death that hung over the capitals' inhabitants, again he presents an alternate power structure to imperial law. Incarceration in the emperor's prisons may be bad, he suggests, but it is nothing compared to the otherworldly consequences of bad behavior.

Although their subject matter is very different, these songs are not, therefore, discontinuous with Rangjung Dorjé's other works. They are still supposed to bear witness to the profundity of his view; it is just that the subjects of his perception have changed. Rather than reflecting on the breakthroughs in his meditations or instructing his students on the path, these songs are supposed to demonstrate Rangjung Dorjé's steadfast morality in the face of temptation, his ability to see through superficial pleasure in the quest for the unfettered peace of spiritual liberation, and the positive influence he had on people around him.

This positive influence is also the theme of most of his liberation story episodes set in the capitals. These stories include descriptions of the time he appeared in front of a court that sought to disrobe all monks because of their corruption, and he talked its members out of taking this action;[76] the time he offered support to his new friend the imperial preceptor, Künga Gyeltsen, when the Mongol leader was slandered, despite the threat this support posed to Rangjung Dorjé's own life;[77] and the time he refused to enact revenge after he was slandered by "bad Chinese monks."[78]

While these episodes offered many opportunities for Rangjung Dorjé to showcase his this-worldly morality, they provided little opportunity for him to demonstrate the otherworldly authority that had built his reputation in Tibet. Deprived of opportunities to subdue demons or evoke thitherto-unseen *maṇḍala*s, he had to adapt his skills to new circumstances. He became prized at court for his perceived ability to control the environment.

The stories that are told to exemplify this control include his procurement of long-life water for the emperor. This water, later storytellers agree, was

much prized by the emperor, who received it in private—which is to say, unusually not in the presence of his minister Bayan—shortly after Rangjung Dorjé's return to the palace. They also include his rainmaking in droughts and his prediction of an earthquake. His prediction of this earthquake at Mount Jimingshan[79] is of particular interest historically because the earthquake—but not Rangjung Dorjé's prediction of it—was recorded not only in the *Verse Liberation Story* but also in the Yuan Empire's annals as occurring on the ninth of September 1337.[80] Rangjung Dorjé and those later telling his story claim that he was able to save many lives by predicting the earthquake, and as Leonard van der Kuijp has pointed out, it may have been this prediction that led to his granting of a Kālacakra tantric empowerment to the royal house shortly after this.[81]

By doing all these things, Rangjung Dorjé was performing the role of a *bagshi* that the Tibetans had been performing since the first of them, Sakya Paṇḍita, arrived at Köten's court nearly one hundred years earlier. It was the role in which his predecessor Karma Pakshi had been so successful, but Rangjung Dorjé's songs from the era suggest he was less comfortable with it. This discomfort is evident in the last of his songs, which he composed at Dadu the year before his death. Like the first song of his collection, it too describes a dream. In this dream, however, Rangjung Dorjé does not encounter a hermit like Saraha or Milarépa in an isolated place: instead, he meets Marpa, a householder yogi renowned for his maintenance of the *mahāmudrā* view within the hubbub of ordinary life. In the narrative that introduces the song, Rangjung Dorjé reports that his dream meeting with Marpa lasted all night, and they spoke of many things, but when he awoke, only a couple of verses had "stuck in [his] mind." These two verses contained Marpa's advice to him for dealing with cities:

> Whatever you think, thinking is an obstacle, so
> Transform it into *samādhi*; this joy will
> Not take long to cultivate, [and] when it
> Frees you from thinking, clarity will arise.
>
> *This* is the nature of innateness; there is no need
> To look for signs and such. [With this view],
> Whatever and whatever are on your mind,
> Their nature, the nature of this and that,
> Will arise as myriad, jewel-like reflections.[82]

Very occasionally, Rangjung Dorjé even seemed to enjoy his work. One such occasion, to which he dedicates an unusually large amount of narrative ink in his

Verse Liberation Story, was the building of a temple in Dadu's imperial palace. As Rangjung Dorjé described it, the idea for this temple first came to him in a dream, in which he saw a sacred space dedicated to the deities who had been the focus of his lifelong yoga practices. One space was dedicated to *Cakrasamvara Tantra* deities, another to Jinasāgara and the Karmapas' protectors Black Coat and Remati, and yet another to the Karma Kagyü lineage gurus. The outside walls of the complex were painted with scenes from Rangjung Dorjé's *Birth Stories of the Teacher*.[83]

Although the emperor sponsored it, this temple was Rangjung Dorjé's project. Indeed, it was an architectural representation of the two projects that had occupied much of his life: first, his own sacralization as a member of the Karmapa body rosary and the greater Karma Kagyü lineage, and second, the sacralization of Cakrasamvara-centered sacred sites. Moreover, as these were contained within the same building, the temple suggested a link between the two.

It demonstrated through architecture that it was fundamentally their inhabitation by holy beings that sacralized sites but that sacred sites also sanctified their inhabitants. By sacralizing himself, in other words, Rangjung Dorjé had sacralized the places he stayed, and by making the places he stayed sacred, he had also made himself more sacred. This building project was yet another manifestation of this broader project.

The description of the temple in Dadu's palace ends part 2 of Rangjung Dorjé's *Verse Liberation Story*, which he composed in Beijing in the spring of 1339, a few months before he died.[84] It was the last thing he wrote.

The rest of his tale was told by others. In their descriptions of his last few months, there is no hint of a resolution to his conflict with court life. Rather, these other storytellers foreground his unhappiness at court, nominating it as the main reason he *chose* to die. This was ultimately, they suggest, Rangjung Dorjé's way to outmaneuver the emperor, who may have controlled movement in and out of his capitals but had no control over the movement of minds between lives as Rangjung Dorjé did. In this way, his death, like his birth, was presented as a show of otherworldly authority.

To help establish this authority, the tales that later writers composed about his death begin several years before the event, and a full year before he composed part 2 of the *Verse Liberation Story*, in the spring of 1338. At that time, say the writers, he made an oblique prophecy about his own death and rebirth. Their description of this prophecy begins by placing it in time and place, to present it as a historic event. "In Dadu . . . as the tiger year began, he spoke to his child-like students," they record, saying:

> Look at my face: I, this yogi, am like a cloud in the sky. It is not certain where I will go. Those who want to pay respect to sacred sites and communities,

> those few who would delightfully entrust themselves to solitude, should go wherever the dharma proliferates.[85]

With this statement, they went on to explain, he had made known his intention to die and even provided a clue about his rebirth. By stating he would be reborn at a sacred site in a solitary place, he had told them he would be reborn in Kongpo, near Tsari.

Those telling the story of his death also presented this prophecy as an opportunity for the emperor and Bayan to read between the lines, understand that it was imperative for Rangjung Dorjé to return to Kongpo, and therefore let him go. But, the storytellers report, they did not. During the next year, Rangjung Dorjé repeated his request to leave with increasing urgency, to no avail. Then, just before he was to leave for the summer court in Xanadu, in the fifth Tibetan month (around June), he saw "a sign that he would depart for another pure land"; a sign in other words that he would die and the journey he was about to take would be the last in that body. As soon as he arrived in Xanadu he "immediately took to his bed."[86] A few days later, despite his ill health, he attended a *gaṇacakra* in the Cakrasamvara temple. There, as his storytellers describe it, after helping to arrange offerings "both mental and physical" to "a sky full of tantric deities, *ḍākinī*s, and gurus," he "sat down in the center of this manifested *maṇḍala*, which had been brought together so very well, and passed into the peace of the *dharmadhātu*."[87] He was fifty-six years old.

But this was not quite the end of his story. Rangjung Dorjé's embodied tale might have come to an end, but there was still the matter of his bodily remains and the narrative preparations that needed to be made for the next episode in the greater Karmapas' story.

The first of these events occurred fifteen days after his death and gave rise to what became the most famous image of Rangjung Dorjé. That night, the palace guards were waiting outside the gates of Xanadu, ready to change shifts, when one of them reportedly saw Rangjung Dorjé: "his complete body and a *stūpa* on [the face of] the moon." When the image did not fade, he and his friends awoke the minister Turan Temür, so that he might be an aristocratic and authoritative witness to their vision.[88] The moon had marked his birth, been a constant witness to the passing months, and now it marked his death.

The next event was the burning of his body, which gave his storytellers a chance to resolve some narrative threads. First, it gave the emperor an opportunity to express remorse, and humility, walking at the front of Rangjung Dorjé's funeral procession.[89] It also provided the storytellers with a superb opportunity to demonstrate Rangjung Dorjé's secret, subtle nature by listing all the relics that his cremation produced. In the main, these included images of the tantric deities he

FIGURE 8.1 The Much-Reproduced Image of Rangjung Dorjé in the Moon.

had been visualizing himself as for most of his life: Cakrasamvara, Vajravārāhī, and Avalokiteśvara.

These relics also provided a means for his physical return to Tibet as "the majority was carried back to the Land of Snows."[90] There they were interred in *stūpas*, surrounded by many images of the Buddha, adding yet more artifacts to the Karmapa institution. His storytellers include other tales of how he subverted the emperor's wishes and returned to Tibet too. They tell of many yogis in Tibet who reported visions of him flying through the sky: some said they saw him traveling to Tuṣita, others said he was traveling toward the south. There was even a tale told about a Mongol mail rider who had not heard news of his death and was, therefore, convinced he met an embodied Rangjung Dorjé on the grasslands between Xanadu and the old Tangut capital. Rangjung Dorjé was traveling in a sedan chair with a large entourage, the mail rider said, and when he asked Rangjung Dorjé where he was going, the Karmapa told him he was on his way home, to the mountains of southern Tibet.[91]

NOTES

1. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 142.1–2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 366.5–6.
2. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 403.

3. According to Gtsug lag phreng ba, he did not stay at Old Tsari because he encountered "negative signs": *Mkas pa'i dga' ston,* 934. The only sign of hope he saw was a Vajravārāhī text that blew out of his hands, "scattering everywhere, so much so that he could not collect it." This he "took as a sign that the [Karma bka' brgyud] dharma would spread there later."

4. After Rang byung rdo rje's time, an image of the area developed in which Old and New Tsa ri were visualized as two ends of a *vajra*, with Mtsho dkar Lake as the knot between them.

5. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston,* 934–935. This site is called Bang Ram spang and Ga ram spang. The name of the plant the meadow is named for is *Polygonum viviparum*.

6. Nags phu Hermitage functioned as a Karma bka' brgyud hermitage until the seventeenth century. The tenth Karmapa, Chos dbyings rdo rje (1604–1674), visited Nags phu Hermitage before he went into exile following the civil war between forces aligned with the Karma bka' brgyud and those aligned with the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682). See Irmgard Mengele, "The Artist's Life," in *The Black Hat Eccentric: Artistic Visions of the Tenth Karmapa,* ed. Karl Debreczeny (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2012), 47. I have not found any reference to this hermitage dated after this upheaval.

7. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 403.

8. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 403.

9. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 934; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 377.

10. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 404.

11. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 935. The behavior of the *ḍākinīs* in this passage is reminiscent of the older stories of *ḍākinī* in Indic language texts, which may, in turn, have been influenced by the Persian *peri* tradition. See David Templeman, "Iranian Themes in Tibetan Tantric Culture: The *Ḍākinī*," in *Religion and Secular Culture in Tibet,* ed. Hank Blezer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 114–129.

12. Here he uses the Indic word for hardness, *sudhīra*, transliterated into Tibetan.

13. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 157.4–160.7; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 378.6–380.1.

14. During Dus gsum mkhyen pa's time, a similar dispute had flared up between Lama Zhang and visitors from Khams. The first Karmapa was asked to resolve it. Yamamoto, *Vision and Violence*, 249–252. G.yag sde Paṇ chen (1299–1378), quoted in Si tu Paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 372, describes Rang byung rdo rje during this stay at Tshal: "He explained the vast ocean of sūtras and tantras to spiritual friends [i.e., monk teachers] during the day and granted empowerments, subsequent empowerments, and profound instructions to *tāntrika*s at night. When he was not doing either of these, he granted audiences to many people, replying with advice to various envoys."

15. Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols*, 80–82.

16. Petech describes the Zha lu Myriarch's flight in *Central Tibet and the Mongols*, 93. Gtsug lag phreng ba provides an alternate (probably incorrect and definitely partisan) version of events in *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 935. He begins by following Mkhas pa Sher rin pa's account but then suggests that after Rang byung rdo rje predicted it, Mongol troops did invade.

17. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 173.3–173.5; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 391.3–5.

18. Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur *rnam*, 173.5–174.2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 391.3–392.1.

19. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 174.2–175.1; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 392.1–5.

20. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 938.

21. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 404.

22. There is a photo of a bridge across the Sog chu in Tung, *A Portrait of Lost Tibet* 115, plate 54. This photo was taken by Ilya Tolstoy and Brooke Dolan on a journey across Tibet in 1949. "[It was] a high suspension bridge," they said, "of ancient and precarious design. The bridge

floor was fashioned of logs bound together by rope. There were no handrails. There were ropes overhead on either side of the bridge, rather appropriately hung with prayer flags. As soon as a man or a horse stepped onto the bridge, it began to sway violently"; 89–90.

23. Gtsug lag phreng ba also described this event and focused on "the *nāgas*' acceptance of all this awakened activity"; *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 935.

24. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 404.

25. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 405; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 241; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 938; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 381.

26. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 405. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 101; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 938; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 382.

27. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 168.3–168.5; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 387.1–2.

28. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 168.7–169.1; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 387.5–6.

29. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 169.3–7; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 388.2–6.

30. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 172.1–2; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 390.3.

31. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 201.2–202.1; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 413.5–414.2.

32. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 48.6; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 223.1. It says, "Like a mother with one child, the unmoving bodhisattva's behavior is wholesome."

33. There have been many works discussing the varied representations of women in Buddhism. See, for example, Alan Sponberg, "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism," in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Reiko Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Serenity Young, *Courtesans and Tantric Consorts: Sexualities in Buddhist Narrative, Iconography, and Ritual* (London: Routledge 2004].

34. This follows the *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur*. The *Mgur rnam* has repeated the word *rgyal*.

35. Māra (*bdud*) is the personification of delusion. Along with his daughters, Māra appeared to the Buddha on the night of his awakening.

36. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 132.6–7; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 295.1–2.

37. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 407.

38. Tib. *las kyi phyag rgya*. Judith Simmer-Brown discusses the *ḍākinī* in detail in *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001). She also describes (237) a similar vision by Rang byung rdo rje's contemporary and student, Klong chen rab 'byams pa.

39. The only time Rang byung rdo rje does not treat the *ḍākinī*s he encounters with absolute respect is when they appear to him in the in-between state. See chapter 5, 11–23.

40. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 405; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 241; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 938; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 381.

41. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 406.

42. Si tu paṇ chen included this edict in his retelling of Rang byung rdo rje's liberation story: *Zla ba chu shel*, 382–383.

43. Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 382–383. This edict is discussed in Hugh Richardson, "The Karma-Pa Sect," 343; Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols*, 86; Wylie, "Reincarnation"; and Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China*, 19. Schwieger brought to bear his extensive experience working with official Tibetan, Mongol, and Chinese documents and said that "the context and the careful source-critical analysis suggest no falsification."

44. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 173.4; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 391.5.

45. Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, 166.

46. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 407; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 101; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 938; and Si tu Pan chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 382–383.

47. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 407.

48. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 160.3–161.1; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 380.6–381.5. The song is called "To the Teachers and Monks of Ra sgrengs," and the colophon reads: "This is the advice given to the teacher and students of Ra sgrengs [Monastery] in 'Dam, by Rang byung rdo rje on the eighteenth day of the second month of the monkey year [1332]."

49. Sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen, *Lha rje Bsod nams rin chen gyi mdza' ba'i thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*.

50. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 407.

51. Rang byung rdo rje says that he died "on the twelfth day of the eighth month of the monkey year": *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 407.

52. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 407.

53. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 940. Van der Kuijp suggests it is the other way around and that Rang byung rdo rje put his head at the emperor's feet: "Kalacakra and the Patronage of Tibetan Buddhism," 35. The section in question reads: *rgyal po gur dkar chen po na gser khri la bzhugs pas rgyang ring po nas sngun bsus te zhabs la spyi bos gtugs*. A shorter version of this story is also given in Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 102.

54. The population of the city and surrounding countryside was about three million during this time, making it one of the largest cities in the world: Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, 123–124.

55. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 940.

56. Gtsug lag phreng ba presents Toghon Temür as a realized being. Later he was included within the Karma bka' brgyud lineage, revered as a previous rebirth of the Situ body rosary: Karma gzhan phan rgya mtsho, *Kam tshang bla ma yab sras drug gi rnam thar*, 91. Rang byung rdo rje's assessment of the young emperor was less glowing and was, therefore, excised from later descriptions of him. Toghon Temür, he reported, was a pleasant child but was under the influence of his ministers, and—damning him with faint praise—he said of him, "The emperor helped the Victor's [Buddha's] teachings *a little*": *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad*, 408–409.

57. The name of this title in Tibetan is Gu shri; Ch. Guo shi, 国师. His appointment was noted in the *History of the Yuan* (Ch. *Yuan Shi,* 元史), as cited in van der Kuijp, "Kalacakra and the Patronage of Tibetan Buddhism," 33n90. Rang byung rdo rje does not describe this appointment himself: *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 411. As van der Kuijp has noted, there is a Chinese source almost contemporaneous with Rang byung rdo rje that says he was given the title of imperial preceptor (Ch. Di shi, 帝师), "Kalacakra and the Patronage of Tibetan Buddhism," 33. But this is highly unlikely, as Kun dga' rgyal mtshan occupied the role while Rang byung rdo rje was in the capitals. See van der Kuijp, "Kalacakra and the Patronage of Tibetan Buddhism," 36–42.

58. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 409.

59. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po,* 102; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 940; Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 386.

60. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 409.

61. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 940; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 388.

62. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 409.

63. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 409; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 103; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 39a; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 940; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 388.

64. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 409–410.

65. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 940; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 388.

66. He calls the region through which he travels—now called Nang chen—Smar khams (Red Khams). This is not the region of southwestern Khams known now as Smar khams.

67. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 410; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 940; and Si tu Pan chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 389.

68. 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 51b; and Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 107.

69. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 410. Later redactors make long lists of the items he brought back from the capitals, but he does not mention them. See Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 940; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 389.

70. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 410.

71. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 140.2–7; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 365.1–6. The colophon reads: "The dharma noble precious Rang byung rdo rje said this on the peak at Bsam yas Mchims phu, in the place where the abbot from Oḍḍiyāna, Padmakara, achieved *siddhi*."

72. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 410.

73. Paul Harrison, "A Brief History of the Tibetan Bka' 'gyur," 70–94.

74. Schaeffer used the *Deb ther dmar po* as his source for this event and, therefore, suggested that Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje himself described them as an eyewitness: *Culture of the Book*, 27. See Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 96. But in my reckoning, the fact that this biography's narrator reported these events without mentioning they occurred at Tsal pa monastery while he was in attendance is further evidence that this work is not Kun dga' rdo rje's composition. Rang byung rdo rje does not say where he completed this work and does not mention traveling anywhere after Mchims phu before returning to the capitals. *Deb ther dmar po* says the work was completed at Tshal, as does Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 940; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 2004: 390. 'Gos Lo tsā ba reports that it was completed at Mtshur phu: *Deb ther sngon po*, 39b.

75. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 202.2–203.2; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 414.3–415.1. The colophon reads: "He said this in the fifth month of the ox year [1337] in Shang to [Xanadu]."

76. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 104; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 941–2; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 394.

77. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 943; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 395.

78. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 943; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 395. Wylie suggests a causal relationship between a singular Chinese monk's actions and Rang byung rdo rje's death: "Reincarnation," 580. I have found no evidence of this.

79. Tib. Gim mi shan. Chen Qingying established this link in his analysis of Rang byung rdo rje's two journeys to the capitals: "Ka ma pa Rang jiong duo ji," 97.

80. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 411; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 241; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 941, 943; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 393. As Chen Qingying noted, the Yuan Annals record several earthquakes in the Mount Jiming area during this period, including a large one in 1334 that transformed the top of Mount Jiming into a lake: "Ka ma pa Rang jiong duo ji," 84. Leaving aside the obvious problems of trying to prove or disprove Rang byung rdo rje's prediction of an earthquake, I agree with van der Kuijp that the transformation of this area's geography previously does not necessarily preclude Rang byung rdo rje's involvement in the evacuation of the area prior to a subsequent earthquake. As van der Kuijp has astutely noted, there are also problems dating these events because Rang

byung rdo rje, other Tibetan commentators, and the Yuan chronicles used no less than three calendars: "Kalacakra and the Patronage of Tibetan Buddhism," 32–33.

81. Van der Kuijp, "Kalacakra and the Patronage of Tibetan Buddhism," 32.

82. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 205.1–6; and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 416.1–5.

83. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 411. A similar project based on Rang byung rdo rje's *Ston pa'i skyes rabs* was undertaken at Zhwa lu Monastery in Gtsang. Although the images painted in Beijing no longer exist, those at Zhwa lu Monastery have survived, and these images include passages from *Ston pa'i skyes rabs*. These paintings at Zhwa lu are the subject of an upcoming PhD dissertation by Sarah Richardson of the University of Toronto, who informed me of their connection with Rang byung rdo rje.

84. The exact date of this composition is included within the work's colophon as "The eighth day of the second month of the rabbit year (1339]," *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 412.

85. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 412.

86. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 412. This work dates this event to "the fourteenth day of the sixth month of the rabbit year [1339]."

87. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 413.

88. Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 243; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 105; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 945; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 398.

89. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 407.

90. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 413.

91. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 945; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 398.

Conclusion

THE KARMAPAS' ESTATE

RANGJUNG DORJÉ'S LIFE lasted fifty-six years and took him from Ladeb to Xanadu. But in his autobiography, songs, and praises, he describes his journey from the edge to the center as a defeat rather than a victory; it was a temporary delay on his preferred route to an entirely other place. Arriving at this other destination had been his central goal in life, a goal that represented much more to him than life in the emperor's gilded cage. In this place, Rangjung Dorjé's writing imagines, there would be none of the obstacles to spiritual progress he had encountered in his world, and he would find all conceivable aids to it. He had heard about this place as a child, he had since read much about it, and he even claimed to have an alternate emanation there: it was the Tuṣita heaven. "To subdue my ego," he said in one of his songs, "I was born the son of a potter, but after I die in this life, I will travel to Tuṣita."[1]

The journey from Ladeb to Tuṣita was indeed an odyssey—not because the distance to Tuṣita can be quantified in any way, but because in claiming this as his destination Rangjung Dorjé was affirming his complete personal, social, and spiritual transcendence. Sons of itinerant potters were not very highly regarded in Tibetan society, but in this verse, this particular potter's son had outlined a social and spiritual trajectory entirely separated from his background. He would travel, he suggested in this verse, to the most revered of heavenly realms, where he would sit at the feet of the next "supreme created body," Maitreya. In the worldview Rangjung Dorjé explicates in his writing, this alternate, otherworldly court far outshone not only the grand houses of Ladeb's local lords but even the

emperor's imperial residence. It was in Tuṣita, rather than Dadu or Xanadu, that Rangjung Dorjé insisted real magnificence abode, and access to it did not come from this-worldly achievements and martial successes, it came from following the Buddhist path.

Access to these other realms provided Rangjung Dorjé and others who subscribed to his worldview with a geopolitical vision entirely different from that of the Mongol Empire, which had been forced upon them. The magnificence and power of these realms eclipsed anything the Khans could create on earth, and his perceived access to them gave Rangjung Dorjé and other yogis like him a power that even the Khans respected.

It was on the basis of his access to Tuṣita and other otherworldly realms that Rangjung Dorjé was able to undertake the identity transformation that is at the heart of not only the verse quoted above but also many of his stories and songs. In these visionary worlds, the link between himself and previous Karmapas was clear, and so was the Karmapas' collective role to bring as much otherworldly magic into this mundane world as possible. Moreover, in creating a link between those other places and this earth, the Karmapas not only transformed the perception of themselves but also their surroundings: a symbiosis between person and place that became one of the Karmapa body rosary's defining features.

In the later Karmapa tradition, the Karmapas themselves are understood to be a sacred site; wherever they go, they sanctify the place in which they abide, and to this day people make pilgrimages to be in their physical presence. In the developing Karmapa tradition that Rangjung Dorjé experienced, however, these places helped sanctify *him*; the establishment of the Karmapas' otherworldly power in this realm was fundamentally linked to the concurrent transformation of the sites associated with their reincarnation lineage. By working to transform their audiences' perception of these sites, they, and particularly Rangjung Dorjé, helped to transform their audiences' perception of the sites' inhabitants, the Karmapas. This altered perception of the Karmapas, in turn, helped to transform the understanding people had of the places in which the Karmapas lived: a sacralized perception of the Karmapas sacralized their abodes. Wherever the Karmapa is, their tradition claims, there is access to Tuṣita.

These sacred sites also served as repositories for the Karmapa reincarnation tradition. Sacred sites hold their sacredness long after more fragile human bodies have been transformed into relics; it was these sacred sites that served as the Karmapas' repositories, places that could retain not only their physical remains and personal possessions but also the memories of their lives and the ideas they promoted. Rangjung Dorjé's contributions to the Karmapa tradition can, therefore, be measured by what he left behind.

WHAT REMAINS, PART I: THINGS, PEOPLE, AND TEXTS

By the time Rangjung Dorjé was born in Ladeb in 1284, the Karmapa project was already relatively well established. Nevertheless, it was certainly not a foregone conclusion that anyone would claim to be the new, third, Karmapa, nor that such a claim would be widely accepted. But when Rangjung Dorjé died, there was little doubt a new Karmapa would appear. In the episode of his *Verse Liberation Story* in which his body is burned, talk has already turned to the Karmapa's return.[2] The next, fourth, Karmapa, Rölpé Dorjé (1340–1383), who, like his predecessor, was recognized while a child, inherited a clear precedent for his claim to be the Karmapa. In Rölpé Dorjé's childhood, even the inhabitants of Tsurpu and Karma Monastery understood that the members of the Karmapa body rosary had a special if not proprietorial relationship with these two monasteries. Rölpé Dorjé's return to them was one of Rangjung Dorjé's greatest achievements.

In their assessment of Rangjung Dorjé's contribution, however, those who later told his story took Rölpé Dorjé's presence at these places as a given and instead focused on several other things he left behind: his bodily relics and the wealth, political protections, and students he had accrued. As explained in the last chapter, those storytellers provided great detail about the various types of relics his body created and the efforts his students made to transport them back to Tsurpu.[3] The storytellers also precisely cataloged the wealth Rangjung Dorjé sent back from the capitals,[4] including the concerted effort he made to transport his golden seal back to Tsurpu before his death.[5] Möngke Khan had first entrusted this seal to Karma Pakshi, and Tuq Temür had later returned it to Rangjung Dorjé when he summoned the Karmapa to court. It represented not only the Mongol court's recognition of the link between Rangjung Dorjé and Karma Pakshi but also the other honors and powers that Toghon Temür had later bestowed upon the Karmapa reincarnation lineage. By sending the seal back to Tsurpu, those telling his story suggest, Rangjung Dorjé was trying to ensure that the next Karmapa, when recognized, would receive the same protections and taxation exemptions from the emperor.[6]

The other legacy to which these storytellers dedicate much ink was his students, for it is they who were understood to have continued his spiritual lineage. This contrasts with Rangjung Dorjé's more generic presentation of them.[7] The only student he mentions by name in his liberation story is the monk who would later become known as the first Zhamarpa, Drakpa Senggé (1284–1349), whom he describes in one anecdote as the only member of his entourage able to share a vision with him.[8] The more high-profile students who are often associated with him are not mentioned in his writing. These include the scholar Yagde Paṇchen (1299–1378), the visionary Longchen Rapjampa (1308–1364), and the monk

Dölpopa Sherap Gyeltsen (1292–1361), who established the extrinsic emptiness (*gzhan stong*) exposition.[9]

In their overviews of Rangjung Dorjé's life, those who told his story also describe his literary compositions, and by all accounts, it was these that became his most enduring legacy. Long after his students had passed and the golden seal had served its purpose, Rangjung Dorjé's compositions still had (and have) an audience. Moreover, not only are these works themselves still being read but many of the ideas and paradigms Rangjung Dorjé synthesized and articulated in them have infiltrated Tibetan culture and intellectual discourse. As noted in the introduction, the most widely studied of these ideas and paradigms have been the contributions he made to the Tibetan Buddhist systems of knowledge through his well-known treatises and commentaries on Buddhist thought. In these works, he helped to consolidate the various traditions of knowledge, tantric lineages, and thought systems that he had been taught in a less than systematic way. His contribution to this tradition has been well documented in other studies of his life and further analyses of his works on this topic would no doubt be fruitful.

WHAT REMAINS, PART II: THE REINVENTION OF REINCARNATION

As this book has also shown, however, in his stories and songs, Rangjung Dorjé was engaged in another consolidation project that came to have an equally profound but less acknowledged effect on Tibetan society: his coeval sanctification of the Karmapa body rosary and the sites associated with it. The tradition's development was aided immensely by historical and social factors but was primarily the result of concerted and continuing cultural production on the part of the early Karmapas, especially Rangjung Dorjé. Others had begun this project before he was born, but his contribution to it was significant. Indeed, as the evidence presented in this book suggests, this sanctification performed the same role for the Karmapa reincarnation tradition that his treatises had for the Karma Kagyü's systems of thought: it provided a systematic basis for understanding and, therefore, reperforming the tradition.

Given the profound influence the system of reincarnation had on Tibetan society, this was by far his most significant contribution to the region's culture. The main difference between the two projects was that while Rangjung Dorjé made his intentions for the Karma Kagyü's systems of thought quite clear, there is no evidence in his writing to suggest that his work to establish the Karmapa reincarnation tradition was planned. Rather, it unfolded as his life progressed, and continued with the retelling of his tale. Like many traditions, it developed so slowly it was easy to miss its invention and assume it had always been there.

This lack of intention is also important because it helps delimit the reincarnation tradition's influence. The tradition did change Tibetan society, but neither Rangjung Dorjé nor his successors and supporters articulate an intent for this to happen. As Rangjung Dorjé's focus on Tuṣita suggests, he sought to leave the world rather than improve it. His compassion for other beings also manifested in this way. The focus in his writing rarely shifted from this. His advice to the poor people he met was to practice dharma to escape cyclic existence. He had the same advice for the few women he met, and for the Mongol emperor.

He departed from this script to engage in societal improvement only rarely; his decision to build a bridge and his protest song against war and famine are the two most prominent of these departures. But even these two exceptions are not calls for a better society. In writing about them, he merely asks his antagonists to perform their ascribed social roles better; he does not ask for reform in society's structures. The reincarnation tradition was not social reform, it was merely a social development, and in Rangjung Dorjé's writing, there is no sense that he sees it as even a social development. This was not a social strategy, it was a religious strategy. The Karmapa tradition would, he thought, help preserve its lineage.

As noted in part I of this book, from Rangjung Dorjé's perspective the most important historical and social factors permitting the establishment of the Karmapa reincarnation tradition were also its lineages. Lineage—and especially the proliferation of lineages during the new transmission period—presented a model for the nonfamilial transference of material, cultural, and intellectual resources, which Karma Pakshi first adapted to suit the needs of a reincarnate, and Rangjung Dorjé systemized. Moreover, the social networks that arose with these lineages created a religious authority that could recognize and, therefore, validate the reincarnate adaptation of the lineage principle.

The project of solidifying this lineage extension was pursued through a variety of cultural expressions. These included the material bequests to institutions that were mentioned previously: cultural artifacts like architecture, statues, paintings, the establishment of ceremonies and literature. Rangjung Dorjé's contribution to the Karmapas' nonliterary cultural production was limited in comparison to those made by the previous two and then by later Karmapas. He did not establish any major monasteries, only small, modestly built hermitages, and he did not deck out any existing monasteries with the golden statues and *stūpas* that helped make them famous. But his literary contribution to the Karmapa tradition was second to none.

Most of this contribution—his systemization, sacralization, and location of the lineage—is contained within his liberation stories and poetry, both his praises and his songs. In choosing to compose his works in these genres, Rangjung Dorjé

became part of these genres' evolution too; he created works that reflected the state of the genres as he had inherited them, and he also broadened the "horizons of expectations" associated with them. Liberation stories map an individual's passing through a lifetime, and Rangjung Dorjé's created a sense of him as both an individual and as a member of the Karmapa body rosary: he was the person, as it were, from Karma Pakshi to Rölpé Dorjé.

The liberation story genre also characteristically positioned these lifetimes in geography. All of the events that occur in these works are sited; the episodes open by positioning the author in a geographic place and then describe the activities that happened there, and this helped illustrate Rangjung Dorjé's symbiotic personal and sited sacralization projects. The inherited characteristics of the praises and the songs that aided the Karmapas-in-place sacralization project were their emphasis on environmental imagery.

The most prominent change he made to the liberation story genre was his inclusion of a prebirth narrative, which pushed back its temporal boundaries. He extended the praises by focusing them on places as well as beings. And he extended the temporal boundaries of the songs, by describing his past-life memories in them and setting them in non-Tibetan spaces like Dadu and Xanadu.

Along with these specific adaptations to the character of the liberation story and songs, Rangjung Dorjé also used them to help establish the Karmapa reincarnation tradition, affecting a distinct thematic change in both genres. The theme is not prominent in his performance of these genres, however, because it is interwoven with two other themes that are more traditionally associated with them: the intention to benefit others and the presentation of the *mahāmudrā* view.

The development of the Karmapa lineage, tradition, and institution works in concert with the intention to benefit others and the presentation of the *mahāmudrā* view because Rangjung Dorjé articulated his sacralization of the Karmapas and their associated sites as a means to these ends; the point of the Karmapa body rosary, he suggested, was to serve as a conduit for beneficial realizations of the *mahāmudrā* view in others.

All of these themes within the liberation stories and songs highlight, furthermore, the importance of space to their presentation: the multiplicity it allows and the intersections that occur within it. Rangjung Dorjé's writing reflects a particular interest in the spaces through which he traveled and their cultural geographies. Indeed, Rangjung Dorjé's stories and songs reimagined the inherited maps of these cultural geographies to accommodate the developing Karmapa tradition. Just as he reperformed and reformulated the Karmapa tradition and the literary genres he used, he also reused and reshaped these maps.

This reshaping included the adaptation of some of Tibet's most influential concepts of place, including the highly influential idea that a region's inhabitants could be subjugated: an idea that was delivered to Rangjung Dorjé courtesy of Padmasambhava's liberation story. He followed in the footsteps of those who had combined these subjugation stories with the notion of power from the periphery that is a fundamental part of Milarépa's tale—to valorize isolated sacred sites and, eventually, present them as *maṇḍala*s. But as he did this as a reincarnate, his approach to these sacralization projects also tied the Karmapas to these sacred sites, connecting their personal sanctity with the sites' environmental sanctity.

The adjustments he made to these maps to support the Karmapas' authority came with an implicit ethical criticism of corruption and, more generally, the nonreligious life—or worse still, hypocrisy in the religious life. He manifests his resistance through his consistent presentation of the alternate, visionary power structure. It was to this alternate power structure that he turned, for example, when asserting his right to abide at Tsurpu by calling Black Coat and Remati as witnesses for his claim.

The Karmapas' rise to power at Tsurpu and Karma was, in these circumstances, organic and creeping. It unfolded over generations, and it was located. In line with his inherited cultural maps, and bolstered by his visionary authority, Rangjung Dorjé claimed spiritual ownership of these places through his identity as a Karmapa. As the third Karmapa, he could *perform* the ownership of these places. If he was the Karmapa, then these were his sacred sites.

He did not even need to be at these locales to enact his ownership, and indeed out of a combination of choice and necessity, he chose not to spend much time at either Tsurpu or Karma. Instead, he turned his attention to Tibet's periphery. Deprived of the familial resources that Düsum Khyenpa and Karma Pakshi had enjoyed, and faced with an increasingly difficult political environment, Rangjung Dorjé focused most of his spiritual and cultural landscaping energies on remote areas that had not previously been developed. In these remote regions, he could not engage in the same large-scale monastery building and refurbishing projects that his predecessors had undertaken, but he could display his transformative literary and visionary skills to full effect. He articulated visions of hostile borderlands as refuges of light in dark times, first in Lha Teng, then in Khawa Karpo, Déchen Teng, Nakpu, and Lhundrup Teng. These places, Rangjung Dorjé suggested, were not really wildernesses but rather portals through which other visionary worlds like Tuṣita could be entered—and, even better, actual spiritual liberation could be obtained in them by resolute yogis.

Rangjung Dorjé reimagined these sites in his stories, praises, and songs through the two methods described in this book: ornamentation and deconstruction. He

ornamented them in two ways: first, by revisioning them through poetic language, which invited his audience to see them as beautiful *maṇḍalas* and pure lands, and second, by locating profound events in them. The profound events he evoked in this process included incidents in the lives of his lineal predecessors—particularly Padmasambhava, Milarépa, and the two earlier Karmapas—and events from his own life. Through positioning them in the sites he wished to reimagine, Rangjung Dorjé transformed these peripheral locales into gateways between the ordinary limited world of normal beings and the multiple worlds to which visionary yogis had access.

Although it may seem counterintuitive, his requisite *mahāmudrā*-inspired deconstruction of these sacred sites also aided the coeval project of sacralizing the Karmapas and their sites. It did this by inoculating individual sites against the always-fatal onslaught of impermanence. The buildings and even the environments in which they sat were not, in other words, built to last forever, so it should not come as a shock to anyone when they ceased to exist. It was not so much these places themselves that he bequeathed to his successors but rather the idea of them, and the methods of their sacralization. By applying the techniques that Rangjung Dorjé had developed, the Karmapas could sanctify any place they inhabited. The Karmapas themselves were becoming a sacred site, and this meant they were free to travel.

Travel is just what Rangjung Dorjé's successor Rölpé Dorjé, the fourth Karmapa, did. He took Rangjung Dorjé's flexible approach to sacred sites one step further by creating a traveling monastery: the Karmapas' "great encampment," or Karmé Garchen (*kar ma'i sgar chen*). Over the next three hundred years the next seven Karmapas, the fourth through to the tenth, spent much of their lives in this encampment. As they went, they collected scholars and artisans, some of whom were responsible for developing influential artistic, philosophical, and literary traditions.[10] Their role as religious leaders also meant that they were, inevitably, political leaders too, even if some of them tried to deny this, and eventually the politics of another age temporarily ended the great encampment. During the life of the tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorjé (1604–1674), another Mongol army dismantled the great encampment, and the Karmapa was forced to flee.[11]

By that time, not only had the Karmapas' reincarnation lineage become well established, but the idea of reincarnation had spread all over Tibet, with most monasteries and hermitages boasting at least one recognized reincarnate, most of whose traditions had a symbiotic relationship with the monasteries in which they lived. The monasteries were often named after the reincarnate or the other way around, and all these subsequent reincarnation projects have their own stores of cultural artifacts that bolster their individual traditions: architecture, art, stories,

and songs. The tradition of located reincarnates that Rangjung Dorjé's life had exemplified had transformed Tibetan society, the way that its people imagined their environments, and even the physical landscape through which they traveled from here to there, and from birth to death. The rise to political prominence of these institutions, which developed with a very otherworldly focus, have been mixed; at times reincarnate institutions have stopped atrocities, and at other times they have been involved in them. The lives of many reincarnates has become increasingly complicated, not only by politics and their influence, but also by new technologies and the unforeseen prominence they have been granted in lands their predecessors had neither heard about nor could imagine. Neither Rangjung Dorjé nor any of the other early Karmapas predicted lives like the ones later reincarnates would go on to live.

NOTES

1. *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 177.4–5; *Rang byung rdo rje'i'gur thor bu,* 394.3–4.

2. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 410; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 241; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 103; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 39b; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 940–941; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 390.

3. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 414; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 243; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 105; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 945; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 398.

4. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 410; Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong*, 241; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 103; 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, 39b; Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 940–941; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 390.

5. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 943; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 394.

6. Unlike the stories about the end of Karma Pakshi's life, however, the stories about Rangjung Dorjé's death do not mention the fate of his black hat. As Jackson, *Patron and Painter*, 58–61, notes, pictorial evidence suggests that while the fourth Karmapa wore a black hat, it was different in style from the one Karma Pakshi and Rang byung rdo rje wore. Thus, Rol pa'i rdo rje only inherited the *idea* of the black hat, which seems to have been enough to support the accrued power of association that came to whomever wore "the Karmapa's black hat crown."

7. I have not paid particular attention to the names and deeds of Rang byung rdo rje's students in this book because Rang byung rdo rje himself did not emphasize them in his writings. The colophons to some of his songs are, however, dedicated to specific students. Gzhon nu 'bum of Lha stengs is addressed in *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 150–153, and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 373–375. One song is dedicated to Shes rab seng ge: *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 161, and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 381–382. Another song is dedicated to Dkon mchog seng ge: *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 162–163, and *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 382–383.

8. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 397; and Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 376.

9. Their names in Tibetan are G.yag sde Paṇ chen, Klong chen rab 'byams pa, and Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan. There is ample evidence for a connection between the first two of these

students and Rang byung rdo rje. G.yag sde Pan chen wrote a description of his interactions with Rang byung rdo rje, described in Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Chos 'byung mkas pa'i dga' ston*, 937, and Si tu Pan chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 399. And Klong chen pa wrote a letter to Rang byung rdo rje that has been studied in Stéphane Arguillère, *Profusion de la vaste sphère: Klong-chen rab 'byams, Tibet, 1308–1364* (Paris: Peeters, 2007), 49–68. Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan is mentioned in Si tu Paṇ chen's list of students and also in Si tu Paṇ chen's retelling of his story: *Zla ba chu shel*, 375–376, 399. But there are no descriptions of their relationship from Rang byung rdo rje's time.

10. Jackson describes the great encampment, paying particular attention to its artistic tradition, the *kar ma sgar 'bri* style, in *Patron and Painter*, 234–235.

11. See Mengele, "The Artist's Life," 33–63.

Appendix

NOTES ON RANGJUNG DORJÉ'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AND BIOGRAPHIES

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

The *Verse Liberation Story of Rangjung Dorjé* is included within the *Collected Works of Rangjung Dorjé*, in its third volume,[1] which also includes a collection of biographies about his lineal predecessors that is also attributed to him.

It is written in three sections. The first two are both first-person narratives written in verse, and they are followed by two colophons stating that Rangjung Dorjé wrote them. The first was written, again after repeated requests from students, in 1324 at Déchen Teng Hermitage, in the mountains behind Tsurpu Monastery.[2] Part II was dictated to "the scribe Könchok Jungné" in the main palace at Dadu, in the second month of the female earth rabbit year (1339), four months before Rangjung Dorjé's death.[3] Following these two sections is a short description of his death and then a colophon explaining that one of his students, a Mongol lay official, requested the composition of this section of the text.[4]

A slightly reorganized version of this work was later included in the series of biographies of the Karma Kagyü collated by the second Zharma Rinpoche, Khachö Wangpo (1350–1405), fifty years after Rangjung Dorjé's death. This attribution has persisted despite its opening stanza, which reads: "As the noble one himself composed a simplified version (of this tale), and he was its only witness, his report is genuine, so (I will) repeat it here."[5]

There is also a text included within Rangjung Dorjé's *Collected Works* titled: *Śri Rangjung Dorjé's Liberation Story*.[6] It is a combination of three shorter texts, the first two of which are written in the first person and attributed to Rangjung Dorjé: (1) *Liberation Story of Rangjung Dorjé's Past Lives*;[7] and (2) *Liberation Story of the In-Between State*.[8] Both these texts are written in the first person and attributed to Rangjung Dorjé. The *Liberation Story of Rangjung Dorjé's Past Lives* is a short overview of Rangjung Dorjé's past lives. As chapter 5 explained, Rangjung

Dorjé mentions the composition of the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State* in the *Verse Liberation Story*. Extensive extracts of this text are also included within Tsuklak Trengwa's *Feast for the Fortunate* and Situ Paṇchen's *Rosary of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons*.[9] As it is not listed as a separate text in the *Collected Works*, it was not thought to be extant.[10] Its story tells the interlife journey between the second Karmapa's death and the third Karmapa's rebirth.

The two texts are followed by a collection of quotes from Rangjung Dorjé that describe his early visions, arranged within a third-person narrative. The last of these quotes aligns with the opening section of the first song in Rangjung Dorjé's *Collected Songs,* in which he travels in a dream in search of Saraha. The colophon that follows this section reads:

> I, Rangjung Dorjé, "lord of yogis," do not remember the past well, but, for the past three years, the faithful monk of Śākyamuni, Darma Tönpa, has ardently and repeatedly requested me to [write this down], so I have written it down. By the goodness of this deed, may all types of wanderers, without exception, quickly attain the highest awakening. The *Liberation Story of the Dharma Noble Rangjung Dorjé's Past Lives* and the ways he saw things were written down clearly at Tsurpu Monastery's Khyung Dzong Hermitage.[11]

As the colophon refers only to the *Liberation Story of Rangjung Dorjé's Past Lives* and is mostly written in the first person, it suggests that the other two texts were inserted between this first text and its colophon. Darma Tönpa was one of the monks who experienced a vision when Rangjung Dorjé first arrived at Tsurpu Monastery. The final time Rangjung Dorjé wrote about staying at Khyung Dzong was as a seventeen-year-old in 1300.[12]

BIOGRAPHIES

Many biographies of Rangjung Dorjé have been written over the centuries within larger lineage histories. The two most influential and extensive, and, therefore, the two that this book draws on the most are Tsuklak Trengwa's (1504–1566) *Feast for Scholars* and Situ Paṇchen's (1700–1774) *Rosary of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons*. Influential versions of his biography were also included within the *Lhorong Dharma History* andin the *Blue* and *Red Annals*. This section of the appendix will work through these titles in chronological order. Readers may be surprised to see the *Red Annals* is positioned after *Feast for Scholars* in this list. But there is much evidence to suggest that the Karmapas' biographies were inserted centuries after the majority of this text was composed in the fourteenth century. As they retell Tsuklak Trengwa's narrative of the early Karmapas' life, it is my contention it was composed after his work.

Lhorong Dharma History

The *Lhorong Dharma History*[13] is an early composition in the dharma-history genre, which traces various lineal histories, focusing on the transmission of teachings in the Kagyü lineage. Its author, Tséwang Gyel, lived in the fifteenth century, and

the text was probably composed between 1446–1451. It is named for his family's estates in Lhorong.[14] It gives a brief overview of Rangjung Dorjé's life based on his *Verse Liberation Story*. It does not include any references to past lives or the journey between lives. As noted in chapter 7, it is also the first text to claim that Rangjung Dorjé revealed a treasure text.

Feast for Scholars

Tsuklak Trengwa's *Feast for Scholars: A Dharma History*,[15] includes an influential retelling of Rangjund Dorjé's life story. It was composed between 1545 and 1565. Tsuklak Trengwa was a renowned scholar who acted as regent during the interregnum between the death of the eighth Karmapa and the ascension of the ninth. His dharma history is "an extensive history of Buddhism in India and Tibet of all schools, but with most emphasis on the Karma Kagyü."[16] *Feast for Scholars* makes an obvious effort to reframe Rangjung Dorjé's autobiographical narratives within later developments in the Karmapa tradition. This reframing is most apparent in the commentary in which it frames the *Liberation Story of the In-Between State,* and its description of Orgyenpa's recognition of Rangjung Dorjé.

Blue Annals

The *Blue Annals* was composed in 1478 when its author, Gö Lotsāwa Zhönnupel (1392–1481), was eighty-four.[17] It is an omnibus work that follows the various lineages of tantric Buddhism in India and Tibet. It has had a great influence on contemporary scholarship thanks to its translation in 1946 by George N. Roerich, with the aid of Gendün Chöpel. The version of Rangjung Dorjé's life story within the *Blue Annals* follows many of the norms established by Tsuklak Trengwa. But it evidently uses the *Verse Liberation Story* as a primary source too, as its narrative ends abruptly when the *Verse Liberation Story*'s narrative ends. It states: "He again proceeded to China, and there passed away. [Rangjung Dorjé] himself appeared sitting in the maṇḍala of the Moon, and the Emperor and his retinue were filled with faith."[18]

Red Annals

As the well-known *Red Annals* was composed by Rangjung Dorjé's contemporary Tselpa Künga Dorjé (1309–1364)—a local chieftain who was his student—it is often assumed to contain the earliest biography of Rangjung Dorjé and his successor, Rölpé Dorjé. A closer investigation of this work, however, prompted by Luciano Petech's doubts, suggests that the section on the Karmapas within it is a later insertion.

First, as Petech noted, the Karmapa section is "disproportionately long (almost a quarter of the whole book) and not quite in harmony with the structure of the work."[19] This section is, moreover, only included in one of the two readily available versions of the text, the version published in Beijing in 1981. Writing in the edition's introduction, its editor, the noted Tibetan scholar, Dungkar Lozang Trinlé (1927–1997) acknowledged that it was only included in one of the nine editions he had collated to create the Beijing edition.[20]

Within this text, there are further clues that this section is a later insertion. When Tselpa Künga Dorjé makes a cameo in the Karmapa's story, he is described in the third person as "the great and good (*dge sbyong chen po*) yogi of Tsél."[21] As "the great and good" is an epithet for the Buddha, it is highly unlikely that he would refer to himself this way. The last sentence of Rölpé Dorjé's biography is also telling; it ends abruptly after the first mention of "the year of the rabbit," 1363, the year that Tselpa Künga Dorjé died.[22]

Indeed, even outside its retelling of the Karmapas' tale, the *Red Annals*'s dating and attribution to Tsalpa Kunga Dorjé is problematic. In both available editions of the text, for example, the section on the Mongol kings ends by describing Toghon Temür's death. Toghon Temür died in 1370, six years after Tsalpa Kunga Dorjé.[23] A thorough examination of all versions of this text and its history would be highly useful.

Rosary of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons.

Situ Paṇchen's retelling of Rangjung Dorjé's tale[24] follows Tsuklak Trengwa's version closely but includes longer excerpts from Rangjung Dorjé's writing. It also contains a list of Situ Paṇchen's sources for the tale,[25] which includes Rangjung Dorjé's three self-penned liberation stories. As Situ Paṇchen composed this work at Pelpung Monastery in Kham in 1775, this suggests that there were copies of these works in his library.

NOTES

1. *Rang byung rdo rje'i rnam thar tshigs bcad ma*, in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. *nga*: 374–414.

2. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 402.

3. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 412.

4. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 414.

5. Mkha' spyod dbang po, *Rang byung rdo rje'i rnam thar tshigs bcad ma,* in *Mkha' spyod dbang po'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 2 (Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1978), 123. Tib. *dpal ldan chos kyi rje thams cad mkhen pa rang byung rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa ni 'dus shing gsal ba go bde bar rje nyid kyi phyogs gcig tu bsdus pa kho na dpang dang tshad mar gyur pa yin pas de brjod pa*. This opening statement

is not present in the other surviving version of this text, Mkha' spyod dbang po, *Rang byung rdo rje'i rnam thar tshigs bcad ma* (available through the Buddhist Digital Resource Center, https://www.tbrc.org, as document W2Z7973).

6. *Dpal rang byung rdo rje'i rnam thar*, in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *nga*:353–374

7. *Sngar pa'i skye bor rnam thar*, in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *nga*:354–358.

8. *Bar de'i [sic] rnam par thar pa*, in *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum,* vol. *nga*:358–374.

9. *Rang byung rdo rje'i tshigs bcad ma*, 376–414. Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkas pa'i dga' ston*; Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*.

10. See Manson, "Life of Karma Pakshi," 44–45; Berounský, "Entering Dead Bodies, Part 1," 27; Berounský, "Entering Dead Bodies, Part 2," 18; and Seegers, "Lord of the Teachings," 39.

11. *Rang byung rdo rje'i dpal chen rnam thar,* 368.

12. This suggestion is further corroborated by both the early dates of the visions that are listed in the text's third section and the striking similarities between the contents of the *Sngar skye rnam thar* and a song composed in 1298 at Khyung rdzong: *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*, 23–24; *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung mgur,* 203–204.

13. Tshe dbang rgyal, *Lho rong chos 'byung*.

14. Dan Martin and Yael Bentor, *Tibetan Histories: A Bibliography of Tibetan-Language Historical Works* (Chicago: Serindia, 1997), 69–70. They also date all these works' compositions.

15. Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Chos 'byung mkas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 2:345–402.

16. Martin and Bentor, *Tibetan Histories*, 89.

17. 'Gos Lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. *nya*:37b–39b. Translated by George N. Roerich as *The Blue Annals*, (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988); Rang byung rdo rje's story is at 487–493.

18. 'Gos Lo tsā ba, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. *nya*:39b; Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 493.

19. Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols*, 3.

20. Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, introduction to Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*.

21. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 107.

22. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 121.

23. Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 29; Kun dga' rdo rje, *Deb ther dmar po*, 32.

24. Si tu paṇ chen chos kyi byung gnas and 'Be lo tshe dban kun khyab, *Bka' brgyud gser 'phreng rnam thar zla ba chu shel gyi 'phreng ba*, 2 vols. (Varanasi, India: Vajra Vidya, 2004), 345–452.

25. Si tu paṇ chen, *Zla ba chu shel*, 401.

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Vol. *ga*: (2) *Mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i gsung mgur mdzod nag ma zhes pa karma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod pa* [The songs of Mila Zhepá Dorjé called the Black Collection, collated by Rangjung Dorjé], 1–774.

Vol. *nga*: (1) *Bka' brgyud gyi gser phreng* [Kagyü golden rosary], 1–352;

(2) *Dus gsum mkhyen pa seng ge sgra'i rnam bar thar pa'o* [Lion's roar: Düsum Khyenpa's liberation story], 158–220;

(3) *Bla ma rin po che'i rnam par thar pa'o: Karma pa'i rnam thar* [Liberation story of Lama Rinpoche: The Karmapa's liberation story], 256–287;

(4) *Dpal chen Rang byung rdo rje'i rnam thar* [Glorious Rangjung Dorjé's liberation story], 353–376; (Including: *Sngar pa'i skye bor rnam thar* [Liberation stories of (Rangjung Dorjé's) past lives], 354–358; *Bar de'i* [sic] *rnam par thar pa* [Liberation story of the in-between state], 358–374; *Rnam thar tshigs bcad ma* [Liberation story (of Rangjung Dorjé) in verse], 377–414.)

Vol. *ca*: (1) *Mtshur phu'i bstod pa: Gnas kyi tshul gsal bar byed pa snyang ngag gyi me tog gsal ba'i sgron me rdzogs* [A praise to Tsurpu: The lamp that illuminates the flower of poetic decoration], 32–40;
(2) *Bden gnas chen po bde chen gyi bstod pa* [A praise to the solitary, great sacred site of Déchen] 40–43;
(3) *Dus bzi'i gnas la bsngags pa* [Extolling the seasons in this sacred site], 43–49; *Rong btsan kha ba dkar po'i bstod pa* [Adorning Mount Meru, a subtle illumination of this sacred site: A praise to Khawa Karpo], 49–53;
(4) *Mtshur phu'i bstod pa thung ba* [A short praise to Tsurpu], 53–55;
(5) *Gsung mgur phyogs sdebs* [Collected songs], 185–297;
(6) *Rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'gur* [sic] *thor bu* [Rangjung Dorjé's miscellaneous songs], 359–416.

Vol. *ja*: (1) *Dbu ma chos dbyings bstod pa'i rnam par bshad pa la* [An explanation of (Nāgājurna's) "In praise of *Dharmadhātu*"], 1–125;
(2) *Zab mo nang don gyi gzhung* [Profound inner meaning], 308–360;
(3) *Zab mo nang don gyi 'grel* [Autocommentary on "Profound inner meaning"], 361–634.

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